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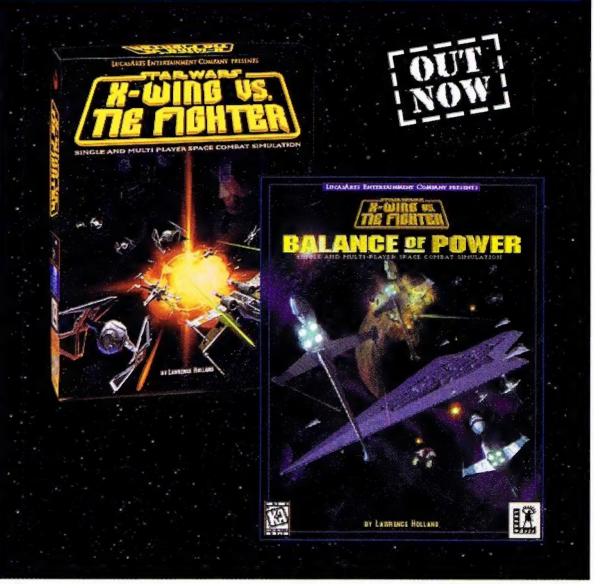

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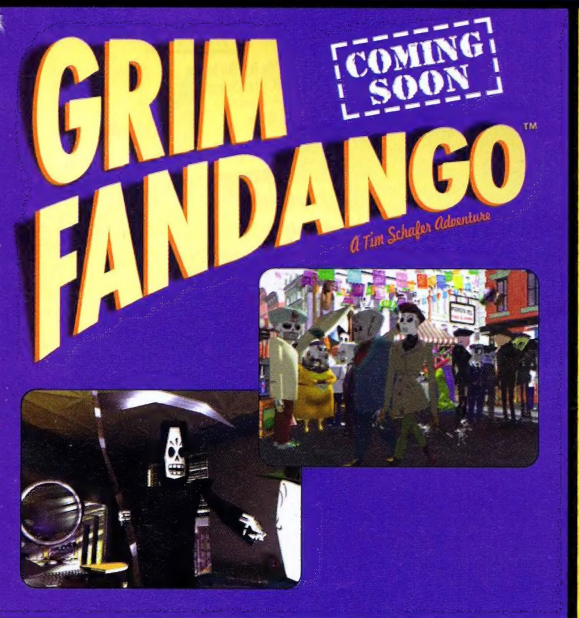

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(15 YEARS & OVER)
HIGH LEVEL
ANIMATED VIOLENCE

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What we're playing: Starcraft, Forsaken, Battlezone, Unreal Beta, Acrophobia, Gex 3D, Spice World on PSX.

Visit us online:
www.hyperactive.com

What's a "gamer", exactly?

What kind of PowerPlay reader are you? Exhaustive scientific study (a quick over the different kinds of letters we get) has shown that there are three basic varieties of gamer:

Type A: Has just picked up their first family PC; a Compaq or Packard Bell, from Harvey Norman. They want to know what cool things they can do with their PC.

Type B. As above, but single young male with clone system built to spec. Same motivation as above too, but with greater intensity.

Type C. Hardcore. With no particular social demographic in common, they are nevertheless all brethren, bonded together by their fanatical dedication to all things gaming.

Often, gamers evolve through Type A, to the highest state of being; Type C. It's a joyful journey of discovery, as we well know. PowerPlay is for all types. We work hard to make it so.

Still, the Hardcore Gamer is an intriguing beast. So, during a particularly productive PowerPlay thinktank session, it was decided that a close examination of this often misunderstood member of the community was needed. March Stepnik, back from a few months of harassing the locals across several politically unstable countries, was given the job. As March discovered, there's considerably more to being a Hardcore Gamer than just owning a copy of Quake and knowing you've got the latest video card drivers. We look at Gamer Food, the all-important Gamer Chair and all the other critical essentials that make sitting mostly stationary for many hours a rich and satisfying experience. We've also got a few sample Gamer Environments, mainly so you hard-core gamers can see that you're not alone out there! It all kicks in on page 30, be there.

Meanwhile, gamers of all types are doing happy high 5's, for Starcraft has actually really truly finally arrived. What a relief then, for all of us - and especially Blizzard, that it turned out to be such a winner. We've been evangelising the need for better single-player game experiences lately, and Starcraft soundly delivers. Now, after the Xmas drought, I'm fighting my way through the totally addictive single-player missions, while trying to get as much online time on Battle.Net as possible, while eying the ever-growing pile of cool new games that also demand my attention... Forsaken, Die by the Sword, Jane's F-15... At this rate I may be able to go a whole month without having to load up MOO2 or TOCA! Then there's Unreal to steal away what little non-sleeping time is left. It really is to Quake, what Quake was to Doom. We'll try and find time for a full review next issue, CYA then!

Ben Mansill
Editor

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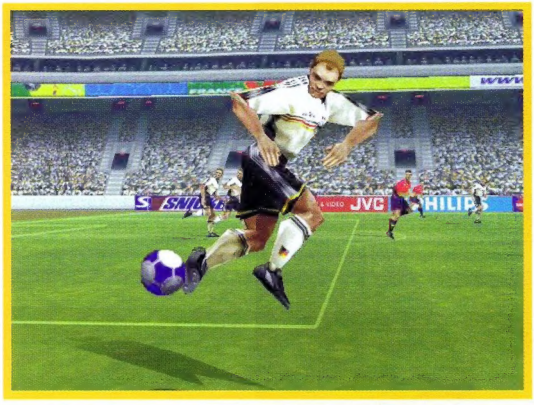

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SOCCER GAMES
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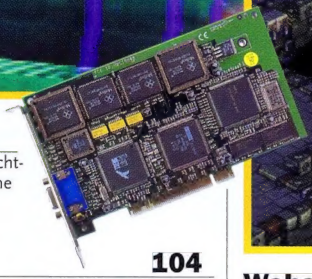

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THE POWERPLAY MOTHERBOARD TEST
The PowerPlay Motherboard test Benchtested: Motherboards. The oft-ignored heart of your system. Must read if you're about to buy a new system.

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Riding high after our second birthday and as a result, fairly full of ourselves, we decide to tackle the big one - The Future of the Internet. Truly essential reading.

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CD GUIDE

13 Demos including Dominion and Castrol Super Bikes

We've made some changes for the better

Thanks to your feedback, we've made changes to the new PC PowerPlay CD interface and we've finally settled on the best solution. You'll now notice that there is a preliminary menu that pops up and allows you to start a number of functions.

Note: *If you have disabled Win 95's AUTOPLAY, run the menu by opening the CD and clicking on GO.BAT.*

If you have no browser:

Firstly, if you don't have any kind of Internet Browser (such as Netscape 4 or Internet Explorer version 3 or above) then you will need to click the Install Netscape button which will install a browser to your system.

If you already have a browser:

Once Netscape is installed, or you already have a browser on your PC, you need only click the Run button. This will start the new menu with the default browser on your computer.

IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS RUNNING THE CD

Please remember, if the new menu doesn't work, the old PowerPlay menu can be started on every CD by right clicking the CD ROM ICON and selecting "Start old Menu".

How the new menu works

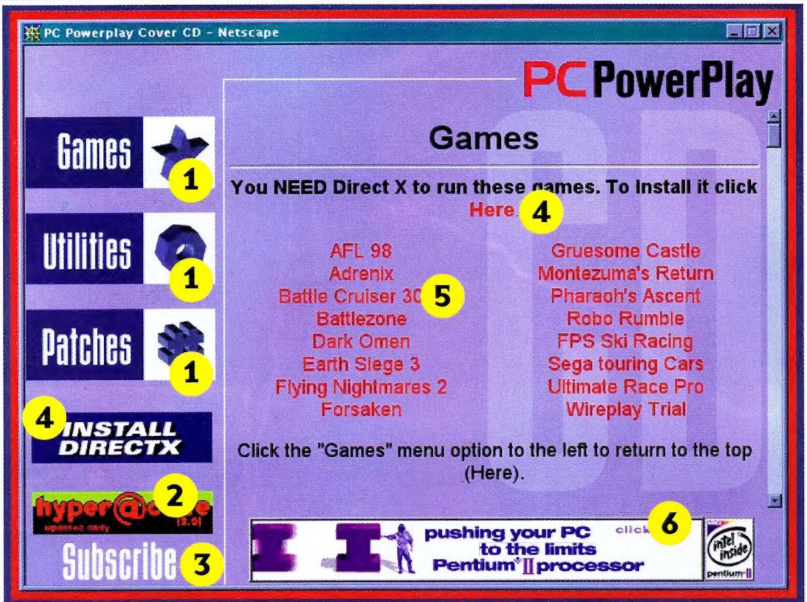
We've tried to keep everything on the new menu as simple as possible. On the left hand side of the menu, you will notice a menu bar with a number of different options. Clicking on this bar will bring up the titles for either "Games, Utilities or Patches".

Clicking Install Direct X will Install Direct X and clicking Subscribe will present you with a number of options that allow you to subscribe to PC PowerPlay.

To Navigate the menu, clicking the big Games button will place you at the top of the Games list and allow you to choose the game you're currently interested in. This will actually jump you to a point within the entire document and you can still navigate backwards and forwards using the scroll bar.

To return back to the top and select another title, just click the Games button again. The same process applies for utilities as well. Too easy!

Also, for those that like to browse their CD, remember that the directory each game is located in is placed in the game description under the categorisation. Entering that directory will allow you run the executable yourself, or copy the entire directory to your hard drive for execution there.



Getting Started

1. Click here to open up the goodies in each category.
2. Click this to go to the best online games site in the known universe - Hyper@ctive!
3. Many incredibly convenient ways to subscribe are to be found here. Win truly amazing prizes!
4. 90% of the tech support calls we get are to due outdated or improperly installed DirectX drivers. DirectX is a Microsoft product that lets games work with Win 95. You need it!
5. The meat of the CD. The goodies for whatever category you choose (Games, Utilities, Patches) will appear here.
6. Visit the sponsors www site, learn something new and useful and help Next Publishing make enough money to keep us in the lifestyle we've become accustomed to.

If you have any problem relating to the new CD interface, if possible, please make a screen capture of the error and send a description of the problem to cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au.

Remember, if something isn't quite working right, just click the "Launch Old Menu" button on the startup menu to use the tried, true (but ugly) way.

The missing DLL from issue 22

For some of you when using the Issue 22 CD, the error "Missing file MFC42.DLL" may have been received. If that is the case, and you could not get the CD to start, that DLL has now been installed on your PC with the insertion of this the May PowerPlay CD. If you had this error and could not get through to us, try the April CD now, it will work.

cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge, send it, together with a description of the error, to:

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Redfern
NSW 2016 (No postage required)

The Games

X-Files Preview

Fox Interactive
Preview
The X-Files game due soon looks set to be absolutely huge. Here in an exclusive PC PowerPlay preview, you have the opportunity to see first, before anyone else how development on this most anticipated game is going.
System requirements: Pentium 133, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard.

Ancient Evil Demo

Silver Lightning
RPG
\games\win95\aedemo
For centuries, would-be heroes have been piting their skills against the Crypt of the Ancients. Controlled by the seemingly ageless arch-mage Alaric, it is believed to have been built over five thousands years ago as a resting place for 'The Ancients' - Demigods who created the world. Now, the Crypt is a way to earn money, as Alaric offers a prize of 50000 gold coins for anybody who enters the Crypt and lives to tell the tale. Ancient Evil is a nicely put together Isometric RPG in the graphical style of Fallout.
System requirements: Pentium 120, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. Controlled with the mouse.

Armor Command

Ripcord Games
3D Real Time Strategy
\games\win95\acdemo
Armor Command is a quite exciting entry into the realm of the Real Time Strategy Game. It offers a fully 3D battle ground with support for major 3D accelerators. With a dynamic camera the action is spectacular being able to easily change from a satellite view to one from your units perspective where the action is. You can Select, navigate and target vehicles and groups with a mouse click. Re-program your troops on the fly without superseding your initial commands and launch cluster assaults in packs of up to 8 units simultaneously.
System requirements: Pentium 90, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. This games supports Direct X Controlled with the mouse

Nightmare Creatures

Activision
3D Action
\games\win95\ncdemo
Nightmare Creatures is The One and the wildcard of this CD. It plays fantastically, rather like a mix between Tomb Raider and Blood. The creatures look genuinely scary and move with a violence and aggression that'll get the old adrenal gland flowing. A definite magic gaming moment is skilfully evading a zombies' advance to powerfully decapitate it in a spray of blood. There's plenty of character moves too from kicks to impressive combo displays of staff or swordsmanship. There's also the totally impressive, grab a gun stick it in the creatures face and sing it a "lull-a-bye".
System requirements: Pentium 133, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. This game supports Direct X This game supports a Joystick/ Gamepad

Croc

Fox Interactive
3D Platformer
\games\win95\crocdemo
Croc is a new 3D platform game that brings console fun into the world of PC's. Featuring excellent graphics, animation and immense cuteness you have to guide Croc so he can rescue his peace loving friends the Gobbos from the grasp of Baron Dante. Croc can waddle, run, swim, swing and even fly (with a little help) around his environment to rescue his little friends. It's cute, it's cool, we love it.
System requirements: Pentium 133, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. This game supports the 3Dfx/Direct 3D. This game supports a Joystick/Gamepad

Emergency

Topware
Real Time strategy rescue
\games\win95\emerdemo
Here's a genuinely interesting twist in the whole Real Time Strategy genre. Instead of using your strategic abilities for causing (virtual) death and destruction, using it to save (virtual) lives. Command police cars and fire engines and save people from desperate, life-threatening situations.
System requirements: Pentium 90, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. Controlled with a mouse

You'd have to be
"PLANE CRAZY"
To think .....

CASTROL SUPERBIKE

Intense Games
3D Racing
\games\win95\castrol
Officially licensed and developed for the 1997 World Champions, Castrol Honda Superbike is a fast motorcycle racing simulation that takes a shot motorcycle racing realism with every aspect of the 1997 World Championship winning bike: the awesome 190 MPH 160 BHP Honda RVF-RC45 simulated.
To win the championship you will have to master the bike and its setup for every track. Multiple options are included to allow complete control of the simulation environment, from the level of the computer opponents to tire wear and whether or not an accident will put you out of the race.
System requirements: Pentium 90, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. This game supports Direct X. This games supports a Joystick/Gamepad

Extreme Tactics

Piranha Interactive
Real Time Strategy
\games\win95\etdemo
Extreme Tactics doesn't offer fancy 3D battlefields opting instead uses the old sprite based 2D terrain system. What it does offer though is unsurpassed customisation of war machines. With the ability to strategise before you hit the battlefield and creating and specialising each unit from scratch, choosing among thousands of variations, Extreme Tactics promises a greater use of the cerebellum then other strategy games.
System requirements: Pentium 90, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard.

Swarm

Reflexive Entertainment
Arcade Action
Swarm is a really nice return to the fast-paced days of 2D action. This reminds me a lot of the old classic from the C64, Pirates of something (Pendelus, something like that). If you know your C64 games, when you try Swarm you'll know what I mean. Otherwise, it's an intense game of destruction that's taken the popular genre of 2D action arcade shoot-em-ups and incorporated high resolution color graphics, gripping sound effects, immersing soundtracks, and an intuitive mouse interface.
System requirements: Pentium 133, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. This game supports a Joystick/Gamepad

Formula 1 97

Psygnosis
Formula 1 Racing
\games\win95\f197demo
Formula 1 was not only one of the first 3Dfx games to make everyone go wow, it was also proof (at last) that consoles no longer had a strangle hold on fast 3D and adrenaline gaming. Formula 1 97 is essentially an improvement over Formula 1 that beautifully drives a further wedge between consoles and the PC (we being now superior with our 3Dfx's et al.) Some of Formula 1 97's new features are car damage, crashes and multiplayer options with vertical and horizontal split-screens.
System requirements: Pentium 133, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. Supports Direct 3D/3Dfx. This games supports a Joystick/Gamepad

Hexplore Demo

Infogrames
RPG
\games\win95\hexplore
Hexplore is a new and rather exciting gaming experience. It's essentially a RPG, but more in the style of the old Super Nintendo classics. There's plenty of evil to kill, lots of tactics between the 4 members of your party and a 3D rotatable playfield.
It's 1000 AD within a world of lost treasures and forgotten realms. In this world, a secret brotherhood of dark sorcerers is searching for a secret manuscript called the book of Hexplore. This book reveals the precise location of the Garden of Eden, the source of the Divine Knowledge. Foreseeing the danger, four heroes decide to save the precious book. Hexplore is a ton of fun and a must try.
System requirements: Pentium 90, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. Controlled with the mouse

Wartorn Preview

Eyst
Real Time Strategy
See this exclusive preview of Wartorn from a group of Australian developers from Woy Woy. This is the new style of Real Time Strategy - with a full 3D environment.
System requirements: Pentium 133, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard.

Dominion

Ion Storm/Eidos
Real Time Strategy
\games\win95\domdemo
Deep in space a beacon sends out a weak signal - a message from thousands of years ago. The message tells of a powerful artifact - The Gift3 Messiah, which lies somewhere on the 3rd planet of the Gift system. It has power to such an extent, that man has never before seen. Four distant races discover the beacon and follow its signal to the planet. Instead of peacefully negotiating with new found alien races being brought together by the mysterious artifact, a massive battle ensues!
Humans, Darkens, Mercs and Scorps fight to prevent the others from reaching the planet. Only small drop ships with skeleton crews can make it through the chaos. You are the leader of one of these crews.
System requirements: Pentium 133, 16 Mb RAM, Soundcard. Controlled with the mouse.

Utilities

After
Win95 Boot Utility
This program postpones execution of another application by a number of seconds, and allows the programs to be cancelled before they are executed.
Its main use is in the Startup group. If you have a lot of programs there it makes boot-up very time-consuming. By replacing the program names with an After command you can (for example) load your mail program 10 seconds after starting up and your ICQ program after 15 seconds.

Command Line
System Utility
Allows for command line parameters to be added to a file you wish to execute by right clicking the file.

Desktop ZXD
Win95 Shell
DesktopZX (DZX) is a program that allows you to create a primary desktop interface using your own graphics and text. DZX comes with a sample desktop that gives you a taste of what it can do. It uses very simple graphics, to show you that you do not have to be Picaso to create your own desktop.

Disk Memory Panel
Disk Util
Disk-Mem Panel is a very small panel that displays the free space remaining in your disks. It stays on the top of the screen or/and on the system tray. It refreshes the display every 5 seconds and can display the memory (Physical and Swap file) free and total in your system.

Flash Screens
Virtual Desktop
FlashScreens is a virtual screens manager which allows you to have a slew of programs open at one time without cluttering up your desktop or the taskbar.
You can specify a screen for your word processing tasks, programming tasks, internet browsing, so on and so forth. Whatever window is opened in the current screen will disappear when you switch to another screen. Unlike in other virtual screens programs, the window disappears from the taskbar also!

Fast Return
System Recovery Utility
Fast Return allows safe recovery of the operating system when a particularly nasty error occurs.

Go! WWW
Internet
Go! WWW is a desktop "add-on" that gives easy instant access to the internet without hogging all of your system's resources. You can enter a URL and the software automatically loads your web browser and tells it to goto the specified address.

Icon Toy
Windows 95 Icon
The first function of this program is to search for files containing icons (ICO, EXE, DLL, BMP). Then it is possible to either copy any icon found to the clipboard or to save it as a file (ICO or BMP). The second function is manipulations with desktop wallpaper. You can use any found icon or bmp-file as wallpaper. Only one click and you can see the result on the screen.

Magic Registry
Win95 System
This program will erase an item off the list box in Control Panel/Install Applications dialog without cancelling the connected program from your hard drive. You can cancel an item by selecting it from the initial list showed by MagicRegistry and pushing the "elimina voce" button.

Panic
Windows 95
Maximise a specialised application to avoid getting into strife.

Perfect Screens
Virtual Desktop
Perfect Screens is a virtual screens (virtual desktops) manager. It allows a user to organize work on several screens (desktops) and make the user to feel like having several monitors. Organizing windows on several virtual screens decrease the number of windows displayed on the screen at the same time and allows the user better orientation and faster switching among applications. The Taskbar is not full of buttons of all running applications but only the buttons of applications presented on the given screen are in the Taskbar.

Revit
Windows 95 Registry
Windows 95 has a set of hidden programs and logs for the power user. RevIt gives you easy access to them by just the press of a button. Depending on your installation of Windows 95, it is possible that some programs or logs are not available which Revit will give you access to.

Web Sam Spy Cam
Internet
Spy Cam allows you to view Internet Spy cameras from all around the world over the Internet.

Start Menu Changer
Windows 95
Start Menu Changer allows you to change around your Start Menu bar and buttons.

Start Cleaner
Windows 95
Removes no longer linked files from the Start Menu.

Z-Desk
Windows 95 Shell
Running as a borderless fullscreen program, Z-DESK consists of a number of screens designed after the computer displays in Star Trek:The Next Generation and Voyager. It enables you to start programs and desktop items, set up personal shortcut folders for different users, establish Dial-Up and HyperTerminal connections, access Control Panel applets, launch links from your Favourites folder, list and switch to user tasks, display system information, shutdown or restart your system, and all with single mouse clicks.

Bonjour
Windows 95 Shell
Bonjour is a project being worked on by a Russian Programmer that looks fantastic. Designed to be an application starting shell, it can be used as an alterative to the Windows 95 interface. The most amazing thing about the application though is its ability to display true colour icons and any size icons. The interface is beautiful and the full colour icons dazzling.

The Brain
Windows 95 Assistant
The Brain is the first software package that enables you to use your computer the way you use your mind - intuitively. The Brain's easy-to-use visual interface integrates information from the Internet and all of your applications, allowing you the freedom to think less about your computer and more about your work and interests. Your mind works in a way that is unique to you, and The Brain allows you to organize your information in the same individual way, without limiting you to any pre-determined file structure.

.... this is just another flight sim!!

It's the toughest racing challenge yet!
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G

sidelines

Logitech has recently announced that they have bought a 10% stake in Immersion Corporation, who are the developers of the I-Force force feedback protocol. Logitech have plans to extend the uses of force feedback devices, and are looking into applications where "physical confirmation of the hand-cursor-screen relationship enhances the computing experience". We think this means that they're going to make mouses that wobble.

Apart from a suspiciously premature review in a certain UK gaming mag, the world has yet to see a proper review of Unreal the game - mostly because as we go to print the game is not yet finished. However, those who just can't wait salvation is at hand - just buy Unreal: The Books to keep you going! There are two books in the works, entitled 'Unreal; Hard Crash' and 'Prophet's Power' and apparently "present readers with a gripping storyline set in a fully immersive world" according to online book store Amazon.com. The most entertaining aspect of the books for us was in the blurb at the back though, which helpfully stated that "Unreal is set to become the biggest PC game phenomenon of 1997". Yeah, umm, did we miss something last year?

One of the biggest success stories in the gaming world has been Lara Croft and the Tomb Raider games. As to whether this is due to innovative and immersive gameplay or the statuesque proportions of the lead character is debateable, but Eidos know they're on to a good thing, and they intend to stick with it. Ian Livingstone, chairman of Eidos Interactive, has said that Tomb Raider III will be out by the end of this year, with Tomb Raider IV coming in 1999. U2 has been unavailable for comment on the matter.

It's becoming something of a tradition for games companies to re-release their old titles as part of a megapack (or some other appropriately hyperbolic name), but usually you'll have to put up with at least two or three substandard titles along with the decent games. Megamedia however will be releasing their Mega3Pak, which is a compilation of 3 successful games; Carmageddon, X-Com Apocalypse, and Ecstatica 2. All three, say Megamedia, have won critical acclaim - inlcuding Carmageddon receiving a 'game of the year' award from someone (we find this a little hard to believe). Even so, the Mega3Pak should be nicely priced, and there are plans for this to be an ongoing series - every three or four months or so a new Mega3Pak will be released with the three 'top games' of that period.

STARCRAFT
The saga begins

How long did it take for Starcraft to come out? Too long! But there was a good reason for this; quality assurance, playtesting, play balancing, and secure multiplayer code. Did it work? Well, so far, the only patch that has come out for Starcraft as we go to print is for a tiny bug in the installation program affecting very few people. Considering how prevalent the 1.1 (and 1.2, 1.3...and of course 3.14) patches are for games nowadays, it's refreshing to see a game stable enough not to require gameplay-patching.

However, There are a couple of issues that Blizzard need to address. Firstly, it seems that if a player logs on to battle.net with an 'incorrect' serial code, the server extracts details of that persons email address and real name and stores it on Blizzard's server. Messages posted to Blizzard's Starcraft forum alerting people to this possible situation have yet to be answered by Blizzard staff, who have been active in responding to other messages posted in the forums. One possible reason for this might be that Blizzard is trying desperately hard to stamp out cheating and piracy - and the action only allegedly takes place when an incorrect serial number is entered. Even so, if it does turn out to be true, Blizzard will have a lot to answer for - if it isn't illegal, it's certainly unethical.

Battlenet.com, Blizzard's free Starcraft server

And that's not where their problems end either. It seems that it may be possible for players to use packet filters or 'sniffers' to make their opposition 'drop' TCP/IP packets, the result being that the opposition misses out on damage they have inflicted to the cheater's units. Blizzard have responded to this problem by pretty much saying that it couldn't happen, though their response was unconvincing to many gamers, who noted that the Internet game 'Sub-Space' had this problem, and some who claimed to have emulated the cheat/bug with Starcraft. This is a sophisticated cheat however, and would only be able to be utilised by a very small proportion of the players, though it is an issue that Blizzard seriously needs to look into.

OFLC to up charges for game classification

In line with our great and benevolent leader's policies of hard core economic determinism and the privatisation of our public sector, the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) may implement changes to the classification process for computer games (as well as other material). Previously, The OFLC relied on a combination of government funding to the tune of around 2.2 million dollars per year, with another 3.2 million (approximately) coming from fees charged. However if the bill passes through the senate the OFLC will no longer receive funding from the Government, and will probably have to begin charging more for classification as they will have roughly a 55% funding shortfall.

At present, it costs around $360 for a computer game to be reviewed for classification, which might not sound like an exorbitant fee, but when you consider the volume of games many distribution companies have each year the figure becomes quite substantial - especially for the smaller distribution outfits, who would be most likely to feel the pinch of a fee increase. Accounting firm Ernst & Young have been appointed by the Attorney-General's department to review the billing structure of the OFLC, and though they have met with representatives of the AVSDA (Australian Video and Software Distribution Association) and other interested groups, the word is that the fees will be on the rise. It's not definite though, in part because another accounting firm, KPMG, has been brought in to examine the potential for cost-cutting within the OFLC itself. While some pundits have been quick to make note of the "plush OFLC offices overlooking Hyde Park" (which aren't really all that plush), others closer to the OFLC have pointed out the number of middle and upper management types that eat up a significant portion of the salaries on offer. Maybe with all this reshuffling and mucking about with the OFLC some Government type might take the time to realise how badly an 'R' rating for computer games is needed....yeah, OK, maybe not.

AMD take Intel on with the K6

If, as Intel's Andy Grove once said, "only the paranoid survive", then it might not be such a bad thing for Intel to be completely paranoid at the moment. AMD have recently released their latest processor, the K6 with the debut chip running at a very respectable 266 and 300 MHz. In the past, Intel has had the edge on both AMD and Cyrix, mostly because of the FPU capabilities of the Intel chips, but this next generation of chipsets from AMD based on .25 micron technology with 8.8 million transistors should at least go a long way towards redressing the balance.

With the promise of a much more attractive price point, AMD are aiming squarely at the existing Socket 7 market, rather than pushing into the Slot 1 architecture of the Pentium 2 chipset, and this should have Intel worried as Intel have officially stopped manufacturing Socket 7 chips in favour of pushing the P2. The question is whether Intel can convince the computer owning world in the usefulness of upgrading to the new Pentium 2 machines rather that staying with the existing Pentium architecture - and the cost of a Socket 7 system with an AMD chip may well prove to be very attractive to many computer owners.

AMD have never been considered seriously by gamers dur to slow FPU performance, which means slow Quake. The new 266 & 300MHz K6 chips may change that perception

3D performance to die for

The Obsidian range of 3D accelerator cards, as featured in Intel's OAA arcade machines, were by far the best 3Dfx cards to have - guaranteed to impress anyone. With the release of the next generation Voodoo 2, Obsidian have recently announced their innovatively named Obsidian 2™ boards, and they look set to be the benchmark for Voodoo 2 based cards for a while yet. There's a full range of models to choose from (provided you have the cash, of course), and all of them feature SBSLI™ (Single Board Scan Line Interleaving) with dual chips on board. The range starts with the Obsidian2 S-12, which has 12Mb of on-board memory and comes with both a PCI and AGP option (named the 'S-12 AGP'. They're pretty good at that naming thing, aren't they?). But the top of the line Obsidian2 X-24 features 24MB of memory with 6 Voodoo 2 processors running in parallel. Benchmarks? How about Quake 2's 'timedemo 1' at 84.4 fps with a resolution of 1024 x 768 on a P2 333MHz system (benchmarked by Obsidian themselves, of course). And if that hasn't impressed you enough, all Obsidian2 boards come with a TV- out, so you can play games on your big screen TV through S-Video or composite jacks on either PAL or NTSC screens. Details of Australian pricing structures, or a release date aren't available as yet, but Americans will be paying around $399 for the S-12 TV, and around $699 for the top of the range X-24. Do the maths, and it shouldn't work to be too much more expensive than 2 12MB Voodoo 2 cards in SLI mode - and you'd be saving an all important PCI slot (or possibly two if you go for the AGP version). We'll let you know when Australian pricing and distribution deals are announced.

SGI instigates lawsuit against Nvidia

Silicon Graphics, best known for their high end workstations and proprietary graphics technology (including the graphics processor and other components within the Nintendo 64) have filed a patent infringement lawsuit against Nvidia, alleging that Nvidia's impressive RIVA chips use technology developed by SGI.

The technology in question is the texture mapping capabilities of the RIVA chips, a fundamental ability of any 3D accelerator. SGI has spent a considerable amount of time and money developing their proprietary 3D chips including the texture mapping capabilities, and as David Orton (SGI's senior vice president) has said "we cannot allow the fruits of this investment to be misappropriated".

However, Nvidia's representatives have countered the claim by issuing a press release that amongst other things states that they intend to "vigorously defend" the company against the allegations. Along with this, Jen-Hsun Huang, president and CEO of Nvidia made mention of Nvidia's recent head-hunting of "some of the best 3D architects in the world" from SGI, although the ex-SGI employees has "no involvement in the design of Nvidia's current RIVA graphics processors".

sidelines

Monolith, developers of Blood and the upcoming sequel, Blood 2, liked their engine so much that they bought it. Well, bought it back, that is. Originally, Monolith had entered into an agreement with Microsoft to co-develop Riot, a first person action game, and the game engine 'DirectEngine'. But Monolith have re-acquired the rights to their engine, and renamed it the 'LithTech' engine, with the split between Monolith and Microsoft reportedly being 'amicable'.

Since the internet and computer games became vaguely cool, there has been a few Hollywood types who have attempted to cash in upon the mainstream appeal of the geek lifestyle. Sadly these have mostly been in the form of crappy movies (The Net, Hackers, Johnny Mnemonic, The Lawnmower Man), but finally someone with some credibility is taking a look at games, virtual reality and the near future. David Cronenberg, director of Crash, the Fly, Naked Lunch, and Dead Ringers (amongst others) is making a new film, called eXistenZ. The plot will centre around Allegra Geller (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh), who creates the ultimate computer game which taps into the deepest fears and desires of the players and just generally screws around with their minds. Hopefully there will be something more to the movie than a few special effects and some mild T&A (which is all anyone in Hollywood seems to think we want).

Activision are going from strength to strength, and are showing that they have a keen eye for developers with talent. Well, in this case it would have been a bit of a no-brainer for Activision to sign Nihilistic Software seeing as the company is headed by an accomplished team, including Ray Gresko, Robert Huebner, and Steve Tietze. Past credits for the members include Jedi Knight, Descent I and II, and the Quake Mission Pack #2; Dissolution Of Eternity. The deal between Activision and Nihilistic is to publish the first three games from Nihilistic, the first of which is a 3D RPG, expected in 1999, though no other details on the game are available at this time.

Still with Activision and their publishing deals, they have managed to keep id software happy enough with them to sign on the dotted line for distribution of Quake III, which is expected sometime in 1999. This is despite the concern of many gamers that the release of Quake II was pushed forward for the christmas period of last year to capitalise on the increased consumer spending at that time, and the subsequent need for the release of a number of bug patches to the game. QIII will require 3D hardware acceleration, and is already being touted as the next leap in 3D gaming. Lets just hope it's released "when it's done" this time around.

Activision splits with Roadshow, joins with Directsoft

Up until a little while ago, Activision were enjoined in a distribution relationship with Roadshow Interactive, a division of Roadshow Entertainment, which is in turn a part of Village Roadshow. Roadshow's part of the deal was to serve the independent stores with Activision's product line. However, recently we received a press release from Roadshow informing us that Roadshow Interactive and Activision had gone their separate ways. The split, we were told by Roadshow, was amicable, it was just that Activision wanted to service the "entire retail channel" in Australia, and the press release ended up with a quote from President and CEO of Roadshow Entertainment, Milt Barlow, wishing Activision well in all its ventures.

However, a scant few days later, another press release floated across our desks, this time from Activision Australia themselves. As it turns out, Activision had a change of heart, or there was a miscommunication with regards to Roadshow's perception of the reasons for the split. The press release from Activision stated that they had entered into an "alliance" with DirectSoft Australia, with DirectSoft distributing Activision's games to independent retailers in all states except West Australia (where Jerdon Pty Ltd will be representing Activision).

"It became evident that in the best interests of Activision and our intent to maximise our position in the Australian Market that we work closely with a specialist in this very important market sector", said John Watts, Vice President managing Director of Activision in the Asia/Pacific region. He didn't say a lot about their relationship with Roadshow, did he?

Quake and Dark Reign (left) are shipping out of a different warehouse now. Is it going to affect you? A big "NO" to that

Drive really fast, get cheap game

In this day and age of saturation advertising and promotional coverage of just about everything it shouldn't really surprise that some companies aren't afraid to push the boundaries in an effort to gain some recognition of their product. Take GT Interactive for instance. Recently in New South Wales, some of those marketing types hatched a plan with the Games Wizards for a promotion with one of GT's more controversial titles, Grand Theft Auto. The promotion entailed customers bringing in a traffic infringement notice of some sort (from parking fines to speeding tickets) to the Games Wizards to receive a $10 discount on the game. Not in good taste according to 2UE's Alan Jones, who was less than impressed when he heard an advertisement for the promotion during one of his shows. The ad was subsequently pulled, but not before NSW Police Association president Mr Phil Turnbull got his two cents in, calling the promotion "stupid" and saying that it "sent the wrong message".

Grand Theft Auto: Stupid game, stupid promotion, funny though

GT remain undeterred however, spurred on in part by the increased sales of the game, and will run the same promotion in Victoria with Video Games Heaven and independent retailers, and they are looking into running it in other states as well. What next? Everyone that brings in a piece of roadkill gets 10 bucks off the Deer Hunter game?

Top Ten Games

Rank TW	LW	Title Developer / Distributor
1	3	STARCRAFT *Blizzard / Wolf*
2	8	STAR WARS REBELLION *LucasArts / Metro Games*
3	10	RIVEN *Broderbund / Wolf Interactive*
4	=4	BATTLEZONE *Activision / Activision*
5	12	JEDI KNIGHT: Sith *LucasArts / Metro Games*
6	16	F15 *Janes / Electronic Arts*
7	6	AGE OF EMPIRES *Microsoft / Various*
8	1	QUAKE II *id Software / Roadshow*
9	-	REDLINE RACER *Ubi Soft / Metro Games*
10	=4	DARK REIGN ADD-ON *Activision / Activision*

Week ending 19th April

The ACER best selling charts are carefully compiled from a sample panel of retailers selected across Australia including mass merchants, department stores, specialty software stores and independent outlets. Retailers surveyed include Myer Grace Bros, David Jones and John Martins, K Mart, Target, Big W, World 4 Kids, Harvey Norman Computer Super stores, Blockbuster, Brashes, Video Games Heaven and Games Wizards ©1997

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MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS 2

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Be the Ultimate Commander

You'd think that the real-time strategy game onslaught might have abated by now, but no-they just keep coming. Now, the ante gets raised with the move of two monolith game/movie franchises into stratfests. Lucas Arts is readying Force Commander, the latest extension into games of its Star Wars line and the first to cross into strategy. You can go into battle as either a member of the Rebel Alliance or (if you're feeling off that day) the Galactic Empire. Not to be outdone, Interplay has Star Trek: Starfleet Command on the boards. Starfleet Command, loosely a sequel to the space shooter Starfleet Academy, places you in the era of the original TV series as a captain in his first command. The game will feature a graphically enhanced third-person interface that lets you handle as many as three ships. Both games should be ready for Christmas.

The Man, The Web Site

For giving you that warm, gentle, fuzzy feeling of raw world-dominating power, there's nothing like having your name as your own Web domain. The latest to give in to the urge for Net immortality is John Romero. The architect of Doom, Quake, and the upcoming Daikatana is prepping www.johnromero.com, where he'll give glimpses of works in progress, opinions on the state of gaming, and other goodies for frag-obsessed players. Be ready to use a Java-enabled browser to get the whole picture.

Sound of the Sentinel

We've always dug the warped visions of director John Carpenter, who brought us the likes of Halloween, Escape From New York and the underrated They Live! Well, it turns out that Carpenter is a proficient musician who's scored most of his own films, and now he's lending his noted talents to Psygnosis's Sentinel Returns, a sequel to the '80s strategy classic Sentinel. The August release takes you through a whopping 600 levels, where you're required to jump into scores of different bodies to progress to a final battle in a wasteland, the Void. Just to creep you out a little more, Carpenter's score will be in 3D Q-Sound.

It Takes II to Tango

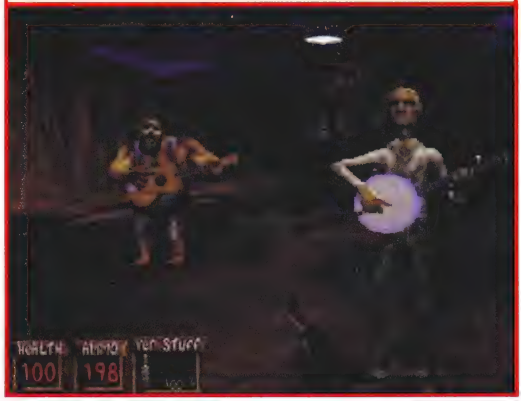
You're about to be inundated with E3 news of the year's big releases, and Activision has decided to make it easy on you-you've heard the names of most of their A-list titles already. Civilization stems from the venerable Avalon Hill board game, not the mind of Sid Meier, but the idea is the same-build a small gathering of folks into a mighty population. Heretic II uses the Quake II engine and adds an intriguing storyline to the first-person battling-you need to find the cure to a sweeping plague. Heavy Gear is already headed for a second go-'round, but this one'll require you to have 3D hardware acceleration to process the futuristic, mech-ridden battlefields. Finally,

Interstate '82 brings the funky carfest forward into the next decade from the '76/'77 releases. We're kinda hoping that this'll sport DeLoreans and Yugos.

Movies and Games, Part 84

Now it's Interplay's turn. The company has tapped Hollywood vet Tom Reed to head up Interplay Films, a new division that'll seek to turn Interplay titles into screen gold at a theatre near you. At first, Reed will look to the likes of Descent, Stonekeep, or Redneck Rampage for movie ideas, but he says Interplay Films will also be on the lookout for original material that could potentially cross back the other way-film first, game second. "The fact is, the film and computer worlds are merging indelibly," Reed says.

Yeah, we noticed. Get the feeling that most of the big game companies saw what a certain blockbuster did for sales of a 1996 Cyberflix release called Titanic?



Ever since the water industry was privatised by the mad cow Thatcher (along with anything else owned by the Government which wasn't nailed to the floor), summer droughts with accompanying hosepipe bans and so on have occurred with monotonous regularity. After an unseasonably dry winter, the rain has bucketed down so spectacularly this month that it would make a Kiwi feel at home. So much for global warming. Alas, exciting new games haven't exactly flooded into the shops. But a few publishers have cheered us up with news of tasty titles in development.

Asteroids 2000

Chief among these is Activision. As well as nailing down the publishing rights to what it refers to as Quake III (and we reckon should come out under the much more imaginative codename, Trinity), it's has announced that it will do another Battlezone-style 90s update of an old arcade classic, namely Asteroids. Hmmm. Plus, it has signed up Presto Studios' Beneath - a point-and-clicker set in the Arctic in 1906 - and will bring out a game based on the Legend of the Five Rings card game. Which won't bear any resemblance to Magic; The Gathering, of course. Sounds like the company chequebook has been kept busy...

3Dfx: Glide lives!

Perhaps because it has established such a strong niche in the games world, you tend to forget that 3Dfx has been in operation for less than two years. The company is - at last - in the process of establishing a UK operation and various head-office honchos have been in town. They released a few details of the new 2D/3D Banshee chip, which is now sampling with OEMs, maintaining that it will avoid the usual 2D/3D accelerator pitfall of decent 3D performance allied to rubbish 2D capabilities. Despite widespread agreement among the developer community that DirectX 6.0 contains the first version of Direct3D that can be trusted, and the impending arrival of the DirectX/OpenGL amalgamation Fahrenheit, 3Dfx is adamant that Glide will live on. It's also confident about winning its lawsuit against Sega relating to the Katana prototype that was canned (let's hope that this doesn't send Sega into an early grave) and keener than ever to get one of its 3D graphics chips into a future console. Wonder if the company has been talking to Sony?

Budget games PC

Intel, of course, has a Banshee rival in the i740 which, to our eyes, seems to lack a few fairly essential features. But the developer community seems quite kindly disposed towards it and in conjunction with the new cheapo

Celeron processor which the company announced officially, it'll feature in many an ultra-cheap PC. Incidentally, the start of Celeron production marks the end of MMX Pentium production. Oddly, nobody seems to be mourning its passing. Gamers with more money than they know what to do with will be much keener to get their hands on the new 350 and 400MHz Pentium II boxes.

Cricket management

You will undoubtedly have noticed the England cricket team's limp-wristed performance in the Caribbean. In fact, you're probably still laughing your heads off (whereas all we have to look forward to is Warne's impending shoulder operation). At last, a sports games company which knows its arse from its elbow has applied itself to making a cricket management game. Empire's International Cricket Captain should appear this summer. It's not yet known whether Empire will make a Sheffield Shield edition, but ICC looks and plays great and fills a gap in the market which is so big you could lose the WACA in it. Head for www.empire.co.uk/icc for more info.

PCPP hot tip: This will be the biggest game EVER. Why would anybody NOT want to spend the rest of their life playing this game?

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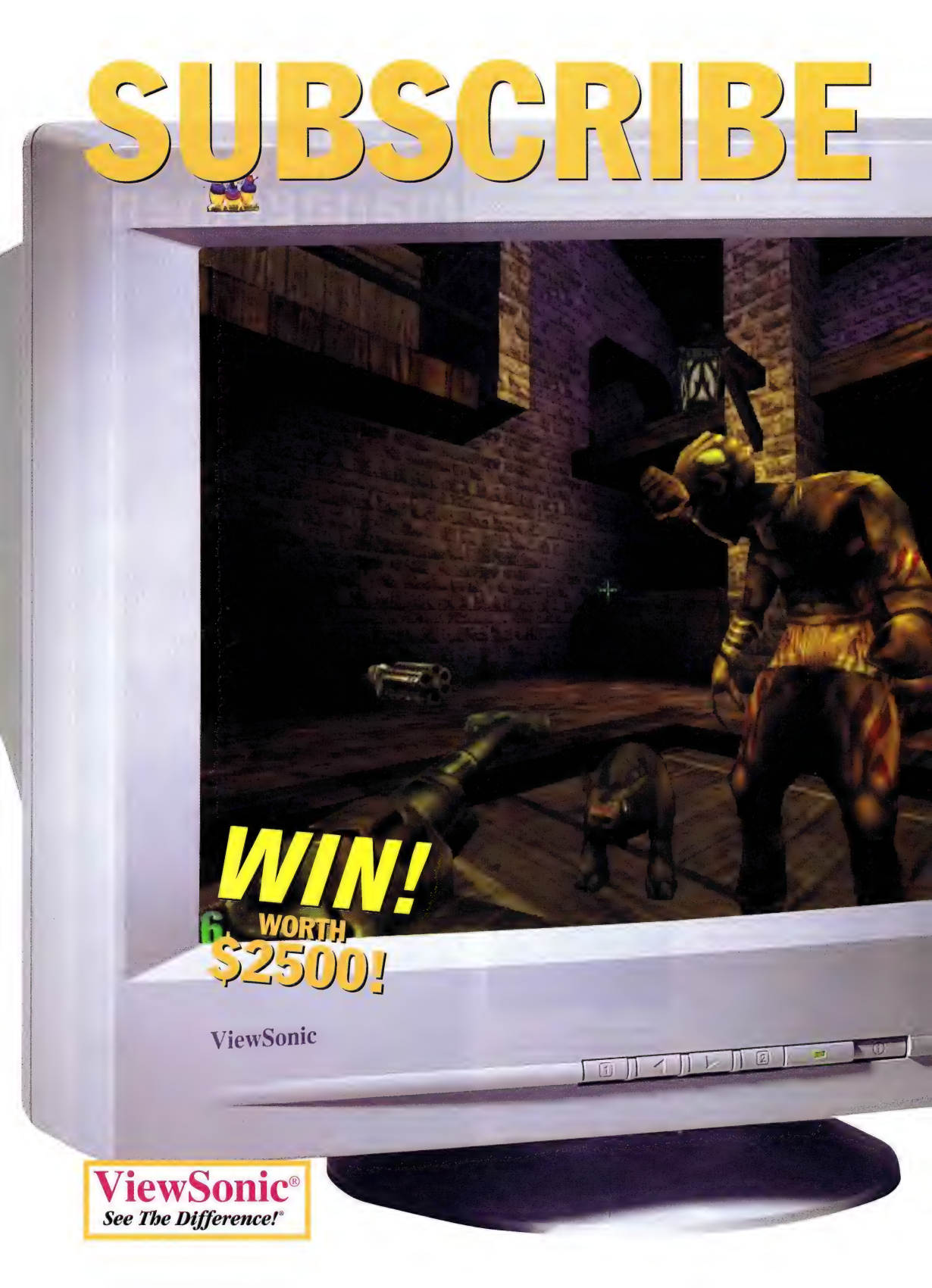

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COMPETITIONS

Win a Voodoo 2 + Games

The world's fastest 3D accelerator could be yours!

If you're a gamer, you'd know. Know, of course, that the new Voodoo 2 3D accelerator is simply the hottest thing to happen to gaming since... the original 3Dfx. You don't want one, you need one. The leader of the field now is Creative Pacific. Their 12 Mb Voodoo 2 is a thoroughly desirable piece of equipment. Creative have supplied two cards, one for the comp on this page, and another for a special 3D Tech News comp. Thanks guys.

To make it really special, Mainstream Interactive have kicked in with 10 copies of the fast and sexy racing game Motorhead.

1st Prize: Creative 12 Mb 3D Blaster Voodoo 2 + 1 copy of Motorhead + 1 copy of Fatal Racing.

9 runners up: 1 copy of Motorhead.

Q. What's the technical term in 3D Acceleratorese for the technique they use to remove the "jaggies" - or jagged edges?

Die by the Sword

3D action games are getting to the point where your regulation "Quake Clone" is beginning to look a little tired. Thank the gods then, for Die By The Sword. This innovative and damn good fun game looks great.

So good we just had to have a competition. Thanks Interplay for coming in on this. 6 copies for the cleverest readers.

Q. What was King Arthur's sword called?

Starcraft

All hail the new king! Doesn't it just give you a warm, fuzzy feeling when an over-hyped, very late game actually lives up to expectations! Well, we warmed and fuzzed...

Say goodbye to regular sleep patterns gamers, that once a year magic game is here. To celebrate, we're going craaaazy and giving away 6 copies of this new classic. Wolf Interactive are to be thanked for supplying the prize. Thanks.

Q. How many Apollo missions were launched by NASA?

Forsaken

Ooooh baby, is this game sweet. Bleeding edge 3D graphics, gameplay that's nearly original but definitely brilliant and multiplayer support that should drag a few away from Quake.

Good old Roadshow have come through with the usual 6 copies for this competition. Go buy one of their games, they'd like that.

Q. What's a spelunker?

WHERE TO SEND

Write the answer, along with your name and address on the back of an envelope. All entries close June 23, 1997 Entries to:
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Issue # 23 winners

M3D Accelerator
N. Tonkes. Hawthorn, Victoria.
M. Lord. Hebersham, N.S.W
A. Toumbourou. Highett, Victoria
W. Savage. Tanawria, QLD
S. Highest. Shiedow Park, S.A

Fallout 2
C. Rapmund. Fairfield West, N.S.W

Red Alert Collector's Edition
F. Vodlan. Melton, Victoria
E. Blackman. Hillback, S.A
C. Clark. St. George, Q.L.D
L. Earl. Woodvale, W.A
D. Watson. Laverton, Victoria
D. Warburton. Flowerdale, Vic

Saitek X-36 Programable Stick and Throttle
G. Blayney. Casula, NSW
M. Frost. Wondai, Q.L.D
J. Chan. Yokine, W.A

Mysteries of the Sith
T. Fell. East keilor, Victoria
T. Bishop. Zechar, Tasmania
J. Osmond. Barcaldine, Q.L.D
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Build your own Deathmatch Maps

Quake II level editing

Ever played a Quake II level and thought, gee wouldn't it be cool if this corridor branched of here, or if this weapon was over there or anything along these lines? You may be one of the sick and twisted individuals that are willing to devote countless hours of their time to designing levels for the world's most customisable game. If you are one of these tortured souls, read on and feed your need...

This page is intended to be a primer for those of you who want to start making levels, and making them (relatively) quickly. I've used Deathmatch Maker II in this tutorial as it's easier to use than most other level design software and includes heaps of prefabs (prefabricated objects such as rooms, corridors, doors etc) to get you started.

1. Plan

Yes, plan. Don't just open the editor and start cobbling pieces of virtual space together. Make up a basic plan on paper, and if you're really anal you can even do it on graph paper and use proper dimensions. Without a plan on paper, it's too easy to get distracted and lose sight of your aim. You can always improve a complete level, but you've got to finish it first.

2. Construct Solids

This is probably the hardest part - actually drawing all the building blocks and putting them together in a way that is playable and pleasing to the eye. However, the pain is significantly minimised if you've followed step 1 above and planned.

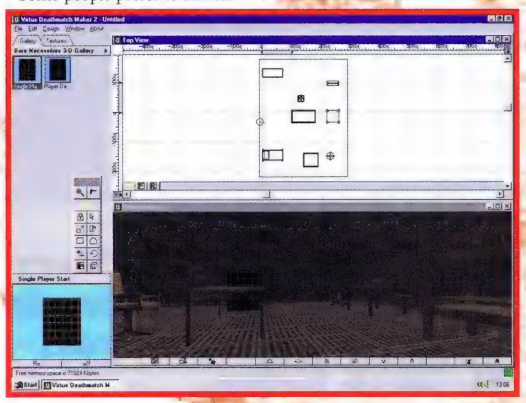
3. Insert Entities

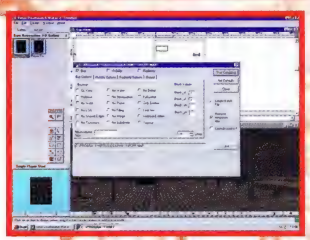
Without entities your world is dead. Entities are things that are not solids - player spawn points, weapons, ammo, monsters, items and even light sources. Some objects are both solids and entities such as elevators and doors. After you've constructed the level, you'll need to insert at least a single player start as well as a death match start if it's a death match level. But of course, you'll need much more to make it interesting.

Think about how many people you would like to play the level and distribute weapons, ammunition and spawn spots accordingly. As a rule, don't put more than 1 or 2 of each powerful weapon or item on each level.

4. Add Texture

Some people prefer to add texture in Step 2 as they go along. You don't see builders painting a building during construction now do you? Build the level first like your solids are all grey concrete, then paint later.





5. Add Lighting

You could make a level that is fully bright, but then you might as well just rip the atmosphere from your map in one fell swoop. Think carefully about lighting as no-one notices good lighting, but everyone notices bad lighting. Make it natural - outdoor areas are bright everywhere, indoor areas need specific light sources. Take a walk around your real house and observe.

Are the present 'hub' maps in Hexen 2 too much for you? Make your own!

6. Compile

The boring bit. This is where the 'puter takes over and converts the map you've just created into a playable .BSP for use in Quake II. This can take hours to days, depending on the speed of your PC and the complexity of your level.

7. Play

Give it to your friends and have a bash. They're the best ones to tell you what's cool and what sucks. Take their advice and go back to step 2 if necessary.

There's heaps more I could go into, but there are tutorials out there that delve into the nitty gritty of level editing. One of the best online resources is R.U.S.T *(www.planetquake.com/rust/.)* If you've got the patience, level editing is one of the most rewarding aspects of Quake II modification. Who knows, your map might even grab the attention of some game company out there one day who's just dying to bring on some talent.

George Argy

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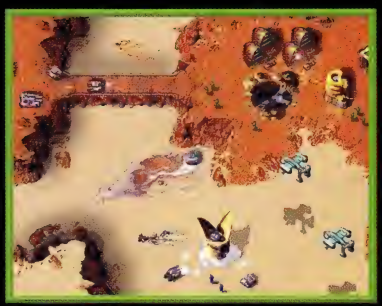

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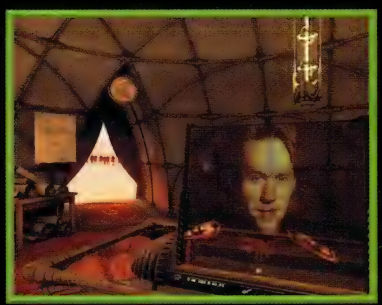

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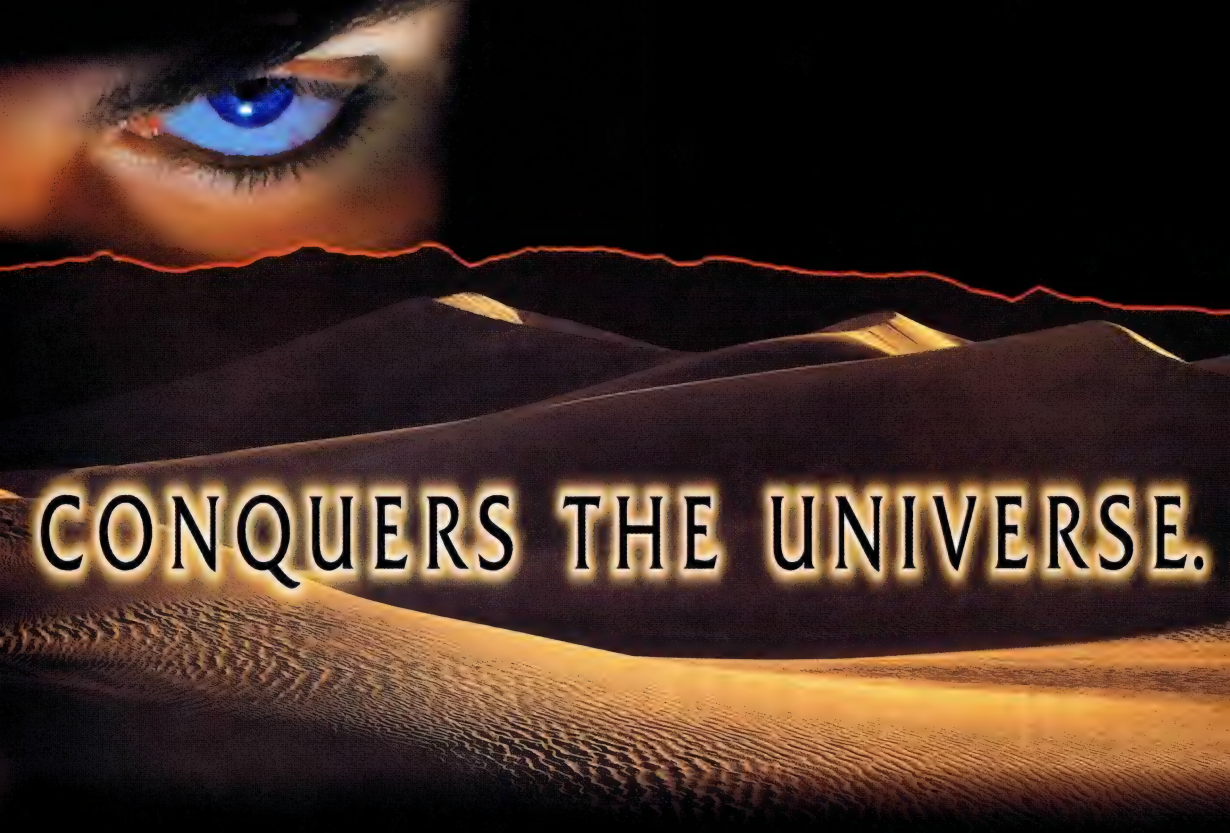
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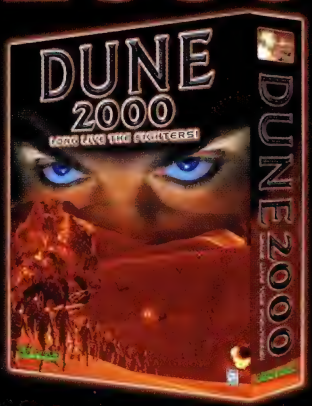

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WHERE DO GAMES COME FROM?

Games industry workers in profile, part 5.

by Brenda Garneau

THE P.R. GUY
DAVE MURRAY

His success is measured in pages, words and pictures - like these here in PC PowerPlay - and the more attention he gets for his company, the products or the people he's hired to represent, the better he is and the more he's worth. He's the Public Relations guy.

While many tend to look upon PR people as used car salesmen waiting to feed everyone a line about "state of the art" this or "ground breaking" that, like it or not, the software industry needs them. Without public relations, getting everything from an interview to screen shots, previews to features, would be a time consuming, if not impossible, process. While a game is still in alpha, they get the word out, and it's that word that finally makes it to you in the pages of this magazine.

Dave Murray, the Director of Marketing Communications for Interactive Magic, is one of the industry's top PR people and took Interactive Magic from an unknown to a industry regular in just a few years. Of course, it helps that industry veteran and part-time crazy man Wild Bill Stealey is his boss. Some things, Dave acknowledges, promote themselves.

Nonetheless, he has a lot of work to do, as does any PR person, and in our continuing behind the scenes interview series, Dave talks about his job, the "used car salesman image," and offers you advice to get your foot in the door...the best door, the most wonderful, state-of-the-art, ground breaking, ultimate door ever.

The PR Man

PCPP: Tough one first. There's a perception by some in the industry, admittedly the magazine editors who receive emails and press releases galore from PR people, that you're sort of the slimy used car salesman of computer games. The schmoozman, the man whose words must all be taken with a grain of salt. Having worked with many PR people, I know there's more than a bit of truth to that statement. How do you feel about that? You think it's accurate? How do you operate?

DM: I think in many cases that is a fair statement. Most PR people think that their outgoing, friendly personalities will compensate for their lack of product knowledge. Rarely is this the case. Most reporters have a limited amount of time to spend on the telephone to learn about new products. Because of this, we require our PR people to play our games before they talk to reporters about them.

As you know, Wild Bill is a "hands on" manager and enjoys playing computer games. He regularly organizes "WarBirds" nights in our office and buys beer and pizza for everyone who plays. In this kind of work environment, it is easy to understand why all of the people in our marketing group play games on a regular basis.

For instance, Lynne Beaman, who was a television reporter before joining iMagic, served both as the product marketing manager and media contact for iF-22. During the beta test/product enhancement stage of the game's development, Lynne was actively involved with the iF-22 team as they decided which changes would be made before shipping the final version. I was the product marketing manager for both iM1A2 Abrahms and iF-16. In both cases, I tracked the games as they worked their way through the development and testing stages. Leigh Cantrell, who is our key contact with Internet Gaming Sites, is currently knee-deep in playing our latest strategy game Seven Kingdoms. If a reporter asks Leigh what multiplay features are implemented in Seven Kingdoms or how many scenarios can be generated within the game, they will quickly get the answers they need. We also recognize, however, that most reporters would rather talk to a member of the development team than a marketing person. Often, we will cover the basics with a reporter and then pass them along to the game's producer or someone else very involved in the project. The bottom line is that we try to learn our products inside and out so that we do not waste time when we have reporters on the telephone.

PCPP: What does a PR guy's job involve? For instance, what are you working on now?

DM: We're currently busy promoting our 1st and 2nd quarter releases for 1998. Basically, with a well thought out media plan, you can easily spread coverage for a new title over a six to nine month period. A media plan is critical to PR. What this involves, what my job involves? The first thing we do is put out a news release and announce general details, but very few specifics about each new game. We send the news release to game magazines, gaming web sites, and industry reporters about nine months before the title ships. Next, we will try to organize a game magazine cover story. We almost always give "exclusive" information to the magazine doing the cover story, then we provide the same information to everyone else the following month. We then organize previews and features that will run in game magazines and web sites during the months before the game is released. If done properly, this will create both awareness and demand for the upcoming title. After the game has shipped, magazines, web sites, and newspapers rush to publish their review of the title. Now, after the game is on the shelf, we continue to work with magazines and web sites in the hope they will publish hints and tips articles on how to play the game.

"Most PR people think that their outgoing, friendly personalities will compensate for their lack of product knowledge. Rarely is this the case"

PCPP: In product development, it's easy to guess what crunch time is - when you're struggling to make the ship date, usually in August or September. What's the crunch week for you in PR land?

DM: The 30 day period before the annual E3 Show (The Electronics Entertainment Expo) is hell month. Since E3 is our biggest show of the year, we work to make sure that we make a good impression with industry reporters. During last summer's show in Atlanta, we met with more than 200 journalists from around the world in three days! During the weeks leading up to E3, we arrive

The Stats

Name: Dave Murray
Age: 34
Company: Interactive Magic & iMagic Online
Where before: Capitol Hill
Current Project: Promoting iMagic Online Game Service
Years in Industry: Gaming: 3, **PR:** 10
Training: Wild Bill's "Boot" Camp
Average week: 50hrs
During crunch: 60hrs
Your job motto: Push forward until the job is done

The Money

According to the Software Publishers Association's 1996 Salary Survey, the average salaries in this field are:
Dir. of Corporate Communications: $70,400US, AUD$100,000
Public Relations: $64,800US, AUD$45,000

The Mind

Being a PR man, a good PR man, requires more than just an ability to sell anything, any concept, to anyone, anywhere. According to Dave, to slide into PR and be successful, you need these abilities:

1. You really must have the attitude that you will do whatever it takes to get the job done.
2. The ability to target, find and form relationships with reporters. "When I joined by Interactive Magic, 'Wild Bill' had just come aboard as Chairman and many reporters were still not aware that our company was open for business. With the help of our Director of Marketing, Gina Waluk, and others I began to compile a list of well known industry reporters. Over time, we developed relationships with each of these reporters so that they would begin to 'follow' our progress."
3. A willingness to go the extra mile to help a reporter. "Most reporters work on tight deadlines and for some unknown reason (just kidding), wait until the very last minute to request information, interviews and artwork, or whatever they need to finish their story."
4. The ability to juggle a dozen different projects so you can meet the deadlines of the reporters you work with.
5. An good, friendly and reliable personality. Reporters want to know that you will come through for them. Their jobs depend on your ability to do yours professionally, completely and in a friendly way.
6. Have a solid knowledge of the products you're representing, the industry and those who are competing against you.
7. Have a solid knowledge of the media and media contacts, what they cover and what they need.

Get the game into your brain

How does his game get on your mind? A well orchestrated and well-oiled PR plan:

- Send out news release announcing game 9 months before ship date.
- Arrange a cover story to run 4 or 5 months before the game ships.
- Organize previews in other game magazines 3 or 4 months before the ship date.
- Push for major Internet coverage of the title during the last two months before the game hits stores.
- Arrange to have the demo of the game on the same magazine issue as the review or the issue after the review.
- Organize hints & tips articles in game magazines for issues following the release of the game.

in the office at 8am and head home around 10pm. Since Interactive Magic is located on the East Coast, we are able to make calls to West Coast of the United States until at least 9pm our time (6pm Pacific Time Zone). In early May, we mail out invitations to visit our E3 booth. We then follow-up with all of the top game magazines, web sites, and industry freelance writers to make sure that they plan to visit us during the hectic show.

PCPP: If you take a look at something like Doom that got everywhere with no PR, do you feel a really good product can still benefit from it?

DM: Yes, I do. I think Tomb Raider is a great example of a really good product that became larger than life thanks to a solid marketing/PR effort. Don't get me wrong. Tomb Raider is a fantastic game, but the awesome marketing push by Eidos turned it into a huge title. From our company's perspective, positive press coverage of our upcoming titles is almost a requirement. We develop and publish sophisticated simulation and strategy games that sell roughly 150,000 to 200,000 copies around the world, not 2 million copies like Tomb Raider or the soon to be released Quake 2. Because of this, we need to do everything we can reach our target audience through computer game magazines and websites around the world. Positive media coverage, more than anything, is an amplifier. It can help OK titles sell even better, and great titles to break records.

PCPP: You have the lucky, or unlucky, job of being the PR machine of Wild Bill Stealey, a man who pretty much does his own thing anyway and is certainly one of the more colourful figures in the industry. What's that like? Has he ever completely flipped you out?

DM: Oh, you have to be kidding! Wild Bill is a PR person's dream! How many computer game company chairmen play their games and can take magazine editors flying in their vintage T-28 plane. It goes without saying that Wild Bill is very competitive and likes to win in sports, business and in every project he undertakes. You should see Bill when he is playing basketball in our weekly iMagic game. Wild Bill works hard and plays hard and is very dedicated to his company and products.

(above) Dave receiving one of many putting lessons in Wild Bill's office and (left) on the telephone tealking to the UK office about upcoming games

PCPP: Suppose there's someone out there with a product, maybe a developer, what kind of PR advice would you give to them?

DM: Well, rarely do you find great developers that are also good at marketing and promoting their products. My blanket advice to an up-and-coming developer is to find a publisher that they are comfortable with. After that, let the publisher handle marketing, PR and promoting the game in retail stores. A quality publisher will handle everything from the design of the box, to working with game magazines and Internet game sites and making sure the game receives the attention it deserves in retail stores.

PCPP: Where did you get your start in this industry?

DM: I was working for a computer company in North Carolina and read a few articles about Interactive Magic in local newspapers. I met with both Wild Bill and iMagic president Bob Pickens and knew that this would be a challenging job and a great experience.

applying for a PR job at a game company, I would strongly recommend individuals pick up a few game magazines and read them cover to cover. Websites like Gamespot and Games Domain are also a great place to learn more about the computer game industry.

PCPP: What are the biggest issues affecting the profession right now? Things people should be aware of?

DM: The unbelievable speed at which new technologies are being released. In the last year alone, the recommended computer has scaled up from a Pentium 90 to a Pentium 166. To be competitive, flight simulations now need to take advantage of Direct 3D or Open GL so that players with 3D accelerator cards can enjoy great graphics. AGP is now being shipped with many new computers. The list goes on and on. But that's what makes this industry, this job, so challenging and exciting.

"Positive media coverage, more than anything, is an amplifier. It can help OK titles sell even better, and great titles to break records."

PCPP: Were games always an interest for you?

DM: Most of us get hooked on games as kids. I did not join Interactive Magic as a seasoned gamer, but I played plenty of Pac Man and Donkey Kong when I was younger. I also played Risk and other board games in college. Of all of our games, flight sims interest me the most. Although, I must admit that I have put in hours and hours on our business simulation Capitalism.

PCPP: Dave, why would someone want to be a PR Man in the games industry more than anything else?

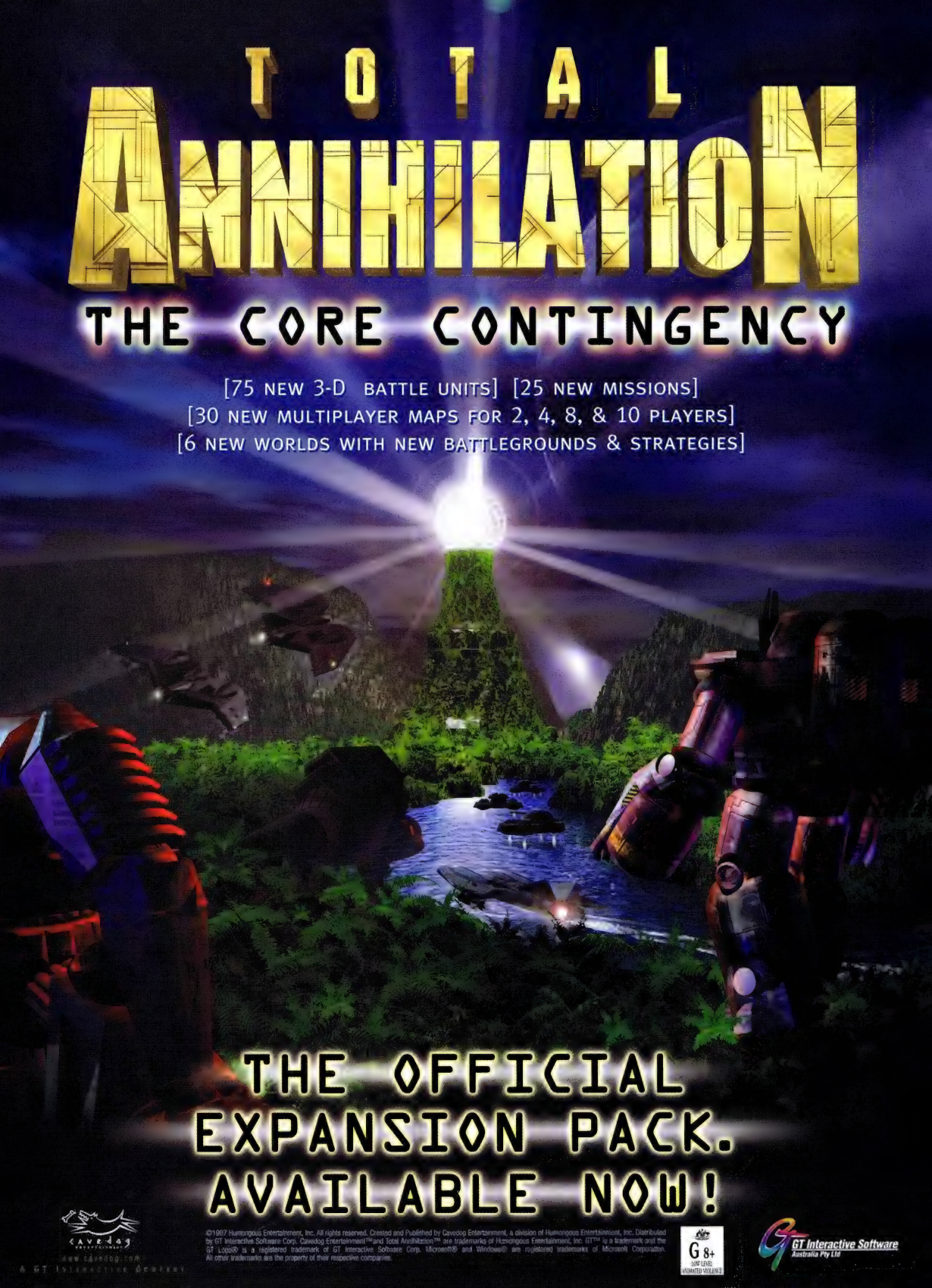
DM: This is a great job, really. I am a very competitive person and enjoy challenges. When I joined Interactive Magic, I was told to go generate as many stories as I could about our company and products. Thanks to Wild Bill and our solid product lineup, computer game magazines around the world have written features stories about Interactive Magic.

We are fortunate to have talented development teams in both North Carolina and Texas. The Magic Labs group in North Carolina developed the DEMON Engine which allows iF-22 players to fly over actual satellite data of Bosnia and Ukraine. The iMagic Online team in Texas created our MEGAplayer Internet gaming technology and also developed our MEGAplayer voice technology which allows players to talk to each other while flying WarBirds over the Internet. These new technologies have really helped put our company front and centre in the computer game industry.

PCPP: Suppose someone out there is at square one, and want to do what you're doing, how do you recommend they break into the industry? What's the best way?

DM: Knowledge of the computer game industry is the best asset any PR person could bring to a game company. As I mentioned earlier, many PR people have great personalities, but don't know their products or their competition well enough. Before

(above) l to r: Leigh Cantrell, Doug Kubel, Lynne Beaman, and Dave Murray receiving a special award for WarBirds MEGAplayer (below) PR person's dream - Wild Bill Stealy (bottom) The iMagic PR team helped arrange the seven cover stories of iF-22 on the wall in the background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LIFESTYLE OF THE TRUE GAMER

You own your own Ninja PC, you've got a couple of joysticks and a growing shelf of games, but are you a TRUE gamer of the hardest hardcore variety, or are you still, and unfortunately, normal? *March Stepnik* shows you what it takes to be rejected by the rest of society.

In the beginning...

The year is 1983. Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want To Have Fun" plays on a fluoro-pink cassette deck. A twenty something university student is bashing away at a recently purchased, state of the art, Commodore 64. It's the middle of the day but the curtains are drawn, giving the room a sense of perpetual twilight - the glow of the monitor basking the space in a pseudo-cyber-moonlight. Lines of code reflect on the student's over sized glasses. A globule of unnatural red "liquid" from a jam doughnut stains his plain white polo shirt. Food particles hang from the nose, cheeks and general mouth area of the face, almost camouflaged by the flock of pimples populating the area. A nine day growth, patchy and sparse, adorns the face. Immediately to the left of the funky brown keyboard, lies a an open pizza box. A few cold, rubber-like slices of mega-supreme lay almost dormant, absent-mindedly nibbled at. A bottle of flat cola compliments the scene. The room in general appears to be the Mecca of activity - books of all types lay open; clothes lay strewn about the place, some clean, some mouldy; as well as other bits and pieces that suggest that the occupant of this room doesn't get out to see the bright outdoors all that much. "Getting some" is the process of purchasing fresh clean underwear. Margaret Thatcher is a sex symbol.

...And today

Thanks to this stereotype, we gamers have been given a bad reputation. We're all supposed to be slobs, have minimal social skills, and look funny. Bah! Get real! Thanks to this stereotype, it was a hard thing to come out of the closet, claim your passion, and bond with other such wholesome aficionados. It has taken a while, but now gaming has been accepted by the masses, even celebrated.

THE SETUP

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SO, ARE YOU REALLY A TRUE GAMER?

What's out there in reality that you can't simulate in a game? DO'H!

So what makes a dedicated, full on, hardcore gamer? There's no straightforward answer to this aged question. Forget all the stereotypes and prejudices, for this is the nineties. By far the most obvious way to start to answer this is by saying that a love for gaming is a definite must. From this, a commitment to getting the most pleasure possible out of gaming is also needed. If the evening screening of Home and Away takes precedence over finishing that last level as the Core in TA, then you're probably just a casual gamer. Playing hours on end makes you an avid gamer, while the real freak will watch their favourite shows, manage to maintain some sort of life, and still get those many gaming hours in. Having the latest, greatest and most expensive however, doesn't make one more dedicated than one with a dated system. The hard-core gamer is innovative, passionate, relentless. So are you born a gamer, with particular qualities, or can you learn these later in life?

While there is no doubt that some of us have what it takes to sit at the computer and play the day away, the true gamer learns and adapts. In an ideal world, there would be no distractions to the time spent playing games. You wouldn't have to wash, eat, pay bills, answer the phone or the door, or use the bathroom. You could just sit there and play at peace till the YOU decide when you've had enough for the day. If only. Gamers now are not just kids with ridiculous amounts of free time and zero responsibility. From barristers to cooks, parents to the single, the young and the more experienced. Gamers are from all walks of life, and you can't tell one just by looking at them. The true gamer is someone that learns to juggle a hell of a lot gaming time with all other social responsibilities, and enjoys it. A true gamer is someone that makes an art of playing games. A true gamer lives for games.

The setup and choice of where to put your pride and joy is the most important decision you will make in your gaming life. Pouring over the paper and gracing the hardware stores, picking your dream computer, was the fun and easy part. For most serious gamers, it's the quickest, sexiest, hottest thing out there on the market - no doubt, no question about it. Where to place your box o' gold, and the way it makes use of its surroundings is a much more delicate affair. This is the part where most freeze, panic, and make the wrong choices, all for the noble cause of getting that computer running ASAP. Great! No part of this is better understood the desire to be sitting at your computer, being one with it, just after you've moved house (and in unfamiliar territory) or bringing home your first bab.. er computer. While bad decisions can be reversed, or at best covered up, they're all a major pain in the butt and take time away from doing what your heart yearns to do. Playing games, playing games, and playing games.

Let's face it, you'll be spending most of your spare time at the computer. So the rule of thumb is this - make you computer space is as central as possible. By this we mean: close to the bathroom, close to kitchen, close to the front door (for when food is delivered), as these will be the only areas of the home other than the computer room that you will most likely visit.

The true gamer is someone that learns to juggle a hell of a lot gaming time with all other social responsibilities, and enjoys it

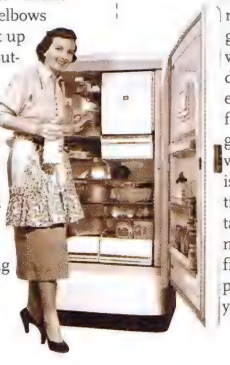
Equip yourself

You're in the 8th hour of a multiplayer game of Diablo, and your bladder is threatening an A1 explosion if you don't relieve that most urgent of calls. The further you trek, the longer the task, the greater the chance of being distracted by real life and the higher the risk of returning to a dead character. Invest in a phone answering machine (if you've got a separate modem line), and make sure to lock the front door. The most hardcore of gamers transform the room in which the computer makes its home into a self-contained unit (except for the bathroom of course). If you can't afford a mini fridge next to the desk for food and drinks, an esky will do. Microwaves can be bought quite cheaply now, so for the winter months, buy one of these necessities. Plonk it near the computer, and you've got all hot beverages and meals covered.

Big desk = big good

Ideally, you want the largest desk possible. Those pathetic space-saving hunch-backed computer work station monstrosities are a scourge to the gamer. You want something that will allow you to stretch your elbows out, comfortably eat up a regiment of computer accessories, fit that large monitor of yours, hold those chunky game manuals and maps, and of course, still allow room for food and drink.

The most important aspect of setting up your computer has to be giving it personality. If your computer space is cold and dull, this will reflect on the person and most definitely affect your gaming performance. If you're happy and comfortable in your space, you're more likely to kick some serious ass in a game, and put up more with those more difficult ones. You want to sit down and immediately feel like you're at home. How does one do this? Put up posters, add some plant life, lava lamps, toys, photo's, make-up, and all sorts of other paraphernalia. A gamer without a good luck charm near the computer is definitely one to be worried about. There's no general rule as to how to give your computer personality, so just flick back through this very magazine to the freak of the month section's to get a good idea of what some people do to their computer space. The sure fire way of really getting in "tandem" with your computer is to give it an affectionate name, and talking to it. Just make sure your friends, family or partners don't catch you talking to it.



SEATING

The goal: To recreate, as accurately as possible, the Captain's chair from the Starship Enterprise.

The chair is a sacred piece of furniture. Throughout the ages, great attention has been paid to the things we sat on. If you were important, or did something important, you got to sit in a really impressive looking seat. This is because we as human beings think of two very important things constantly in every day existence. Our butts, and our stomachs, and in that order. If the butt's happy and comfortable, the personality, the psyche, is happy and comfortable. It's a simple fact. Same goes for gaming. If you're comfortable, you'll be able to play longer, and with less interruptions. In multiplayer gaming especially, you'll perform better. So the importance of a good chair and a comfy butt cannot be stressed enough.

Make sure it's tough

Since we are all different in shape and size, this aspect of gaming is really going to require some leg work. Always try before you buy. The chair should have adjustable arm rests, and the seat should be able to raised and lowered at will. The back rest should have height and tilt adjustment, and most importantly the butt cushion should also allow tilt adjustment. You may want to choose a rugged material too, as this seat is going to get the most rough treatment of any piece of furniture in the house. Basically - if you're not comfortable sitting in it, don't buy it.

So how do you sit in it? The reality goes something like this. The base of spine and top of pelvis sits just on the edge of the chair. The back is horribly curved, the body almost horizontal. One foot rests at a side angle on the desk with the other firmly on the ground in a normal position. This is the computer bum position, a much celebrated and almost sacred seating arrangement. As comfortable as it may be, you're not allowing yourself to be at peak gaming fitness. You're putting unnecessary strain on the back and shoulders. Muscle aches and spasms are common. You will feel stiff and sore, and this results in lower frag counts and more defeats. You hit the hay sooner than usual, and may even further complicate your health. In relation to the desk and computer, your forearms should rest flat and comfortably on the desk, almost at a right angle to the upper arm. The monitor should be at eye level, to reduce neck strain. The actual seat should be tilted forward slightly, and your feet should be flat on the floor, parallel to your upper body. The reason for the tilt in the seat is this - recent studies have shown that the most comfortable body position in zero gravity is to have your upper legs at an approximately 125 degree angle to your upper body. In this position, you will feel more comfortable and be able to handle longer gaming sessions. During intense gaming moments or just prior to your opponents defeat, of course, it's forgivable to lean fully into the screen and sneer. Also, it's recommended that you take regular breaks from sitting at the computer and go for a bit of a stretch. Don't worry though! Five minutes is more than enough.

WITH HER NEW CHAIR, MARTHA COULD COMMAND HER MIGHTY ZERG FORCES IN COMFORT...

Note: **For multiplayer gaming (networked), one of those massive leather executive chairs can be a powerful ally in your quest for domination. Not only will you feel more important, your size advantage will draw attention and intimidate your opponents. This can give you that extra edge in highly competitive matches, as well as being a pure joy to sit in. Be careful though, getting something too comfortable can also be a boon - if you start to nod off or get lazy, things can really get messy.**

FOOD - The eating game

Not all of us are great cooks, and with many of us, any extended period of time in the kitchen is a nightmare. However, a bowl of mixed lollies, beer nuts, noodles in a bowl, corn ships, and cola does NOT satisfy the five healthy food group pyramid. The Australian Pizza (cheese and vegemite on white bread, grilled) only works for a few days. Your parents were right too, if you don't eat the right foods, you will start to suffer health problems which, you guessed it, can lead to less time playing. So what are the options? Take away and home delivery is the most commonly used option, with all manner of food now being brought to your front door for a fee. Mexican, Thai, Chinese, Pizza, BBQ are the most popular foods, and ensure that you can have something nutritious and filling most days of the week, as well as satisfying that urge for variety. There's no preparation time, and those more skilled can even play while they eat with no disruption to the process. Again though, getting food delivered to your door every day of the week is an expensive prospect, and you could easily buy a game a week with the money saved. So what do we normal people do? The only answer is to go out there and learn some quick and easy dishes. Doesn't sound like fun, but it pays in the long run. For those really stuck and wanting a place to start, look for the PC PowerPlay Clever Cook Book currently in production.

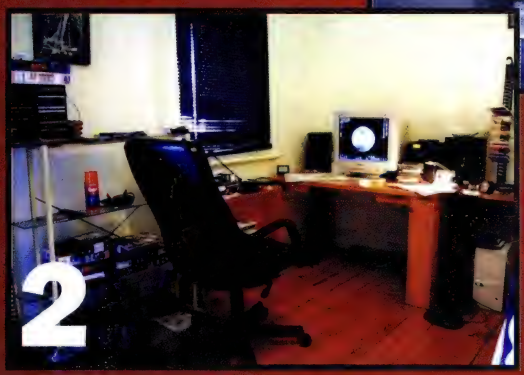
Building a Perfect World

So how do you tell if someone's a true gamer or not? Learn to read people's set up. Just as an archaeologist paints a scene from bits and pieces scattered about the place, so can you analyse your friend's gaming room and deduce vital bits of information that can be helpful to your next "friendly" multiplayer game. For example:

GAMER 1

The alphabeticised game shelf

Boring. Boring. Boring. While the initial impression may be "Wow! Look at all those games! They must be a real gamer!", take your time to examine the rest of the scene. Everything is too organised. Boxes are arranged in some order, disk's are neatly put away, and there are no manuals lying about the place. There's barely a speck of dust to be seen, so it could be said this gamer seems to put more time into organising their space and keeping it clean than actually playing anything. With displaying all the games right above the computer, this gamer seems value appearance over substance, and likes to lay their cards out on the table for all to see. In multiplayer, probably an average challenge. As far as the actual desk space - very clean and sterile. Probably not much of a gamer.



GAMER 2

The Command Station

Here we have order in chaos. At first glance the room looks rather clean and organized. After a closer look, one can see all the finer details that point to a dedicated gamer. It's all the little things. One of the major signs is the computer - the shell's been loosely replaced indicating major traffic of computer parts. The number of joysticks indicates this gamer prefers a stick for every occasion. Manuals and boxes lay haphazardly stacked in the most readily convenient of places, indicating much play time. The big chair speak volumes, while it is exceedingly comfortable, it's main purpose is to look fearsome and cool. This aspect of this gamer's personality carries over to the excess of black equipment. Gamer 2 spends close to 50 hours a week at his station and likes to feel like he's in a complete environment. Note the arm's reach Baygon for errant intruders - this gamer doesn't get up for anything. Note also the PC PowerPlay at easy reaching distance. A true gamer, and most likely a formidable multiplayer opponent.

GAMER 3

The screen is the center of the universe

Games are and should be, all consuming. This desk is all consumed. Because gamers have no friends they actually physically meet, and because they're disowned and therefore never visited by their parents, cleanliness is a non-issue. Some gamers visualise their entire desk as a gaming environment, this gamer obviously only considers the screen area of his monitor as the only area of importance. This gamer also has an obvious space problem and is to be commended for fitting so much into just a couple of square metres. The True Gamer doesn't care what other think - this desk belongs to a True Gamer.

GAMER 4

The Comfort Zone

The ideal game desk is arranged so that everything that's ever needed is within a 1 metre radius of the chair. The equipment rack on the right is a great touch - open with its contents visible. Also note the cushion on a raised pedestal on the left of the chair. This is the Cat Spot. This gamer likes to comfort his aging feline bestfriend with his left hand, while crushing the revolting hordes with his right hand. Beautiful.

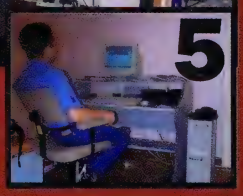
Gamer 4 also appreciates the importance of a great chair. This ergonomic comfort-wonder has all the desired adjustables and is damn comfortable.

Gamer 4 shopped around and found himself an extra long keyboard cable, allowing feet on desk, keyboard on lap game relaxation. Gamer 4, while disturbingly neat, lives to game and wants the experience to be as comfortable and relaxing as possible.

GAMER 5

The Pretender

This ain't no gamer. He either moves house a lot and likes his gear easily de-constructible, or just doesn't care. As practical as they are, ergonomic workstations just don't cut it. Nobody is impressed by them, they make you think you're still at work. This lad claims to be a gamer, but only has one set of speakers which he moves from his stereo to PC as needed. This ain't no gamer...



FIFA
ELECTRONIC A

JVC
SPORT

adidas
SPORTS
SNICKERS
JVC

adid

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SPORTS

'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY!

The BIG soccer game roundup by Gareth Jones

Why is it the season to be jolly? Why, it's World Cup season of course! It only comes but once every four years, but is well worth the wait, with the best players in the world pitted against each other, whole nations rising as one behind their team, Australians left once again to curse their fortunes at not being included in the proceedings, and (almost) best of all, plenty of quality football simulations to play during the half time breaks. And that's what we're taking a look at this month - what's new in the world of football sims, what can you do with them, as well as a bit of a rant about what people really want from a football game, as opposed to what we've been getting.

Is big, is good

It's the worlds most popular game by a huge margin. It's the worlds most played game, and as surprising as it may sound, it's also the most played game in Australia. It follows that there will be a fair amount of PC gamers who follow football, even in Australia, where it's almost verboten to speak of soccer after you turn 16 largely because the racially based clubs continue to keep the sport marginalised and ethnicised...but I digress). The audience for the 1994 World Cup Final between Italy and Brazil was the largest ever for a television event in the history of the world - around 1.7 billion viewers, and this time around it's estimated to go even higher.

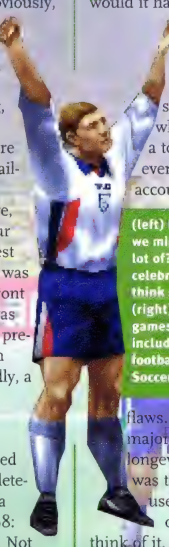
C64 soccer

Sports sims, and football sims have been around ever since the dawn of computers as entertainment devices. You can see from some of the screenshots included around these pages that even in the days of the C64 there were plenty of different types of football games. Some, obviously, were a bit silly ('Street Soccer' for instance), and some were just plain ludicrous ('Wheelchair Football'? You're kidding, right?), but even from as far as back then there were quality football games available, like the legendary International Soccer. Sure, you could only run in four directions and the flashiest move you could perform was chipping the ball up in front of you, but the balance was there and I still think I'd prefer to play that today than FIFA 97 - which was, sadly, a complete dog.

Lord FIFA 98

EA Sports have redeemed themselves almost completely to my eyes, and many a gamers eyes with FIFA 98: Road To The World Cup. Not only are the graphics jaw-droppingly good, but the all important gameplay is there in spades too. Leaving aside the decidedly substandard management interface, which looks quite pretty and stylish but just isn't functional. Then there's the archaic modem setup (Dear EA Sports people, have you ever heard of Direct Play?), which along with being old and cumbersome is also buggy and a large black mark on the game. And then, to top it all off, there's the almost inexcusable lack of TCP/IP play (Dear EA sports people, have you ever heard of Direct Play?), and of course the lack of a dedicated internet game server. How hard would it have been, really?

But the continuing interest in the game is testament to the staying power of what is ultimately a top shelf release, even taking into account the glaring flaws. One of the major reasons for the longevity of Quake was the amount of user created add-ons. If you could think of it, you could pretty much do it with Quake, and though FIFA 98 isn't quite as versatile there are still plenty of fans who have had a bit of a fiddle with the inner workings of the game and managed to come up with some cool new stuff too. The best page on the web for the FIFA series is FIFA Online, maintained by Matt Holme (and he's Australian too!), and the site contains a huge selection of modifications, utilities, and editors for the game, as well as hosting leagues, tournaments and so on. He's been kind enough to allow us to place a selection of the files on offer on



(left) Is this something we might be seeing a lot of? English players celebrating... don't think so.
(right) classic C64 games of yesteryear, including Wheelchair football & Street Soccer !!??!!

our cover CD this month (see file listing), but if you've got web access head on over to *fifa.neurogamer.com /fifa98* for a full run down on all that's happening in the world of FIFA.

But that's not all that's on the site, there's a very nice section on the latest in the FIFA series; 'World Cup 98'. The premise might seem a bit dodgy - it's a sort of sequel to RTWC, and you can only take part in the World Cup itself, there's no leagues to play (although you will have access to some 'classic' teams once you win the Cup). But it's not dodgy at all (or at least it doesn't look dodgy) - WC 98 should address many of the problems with FIFA 98, as well as improve upon the graphical look of the game itself. Check out the preview at the end of this article for all the info, as well as taking a look at *fifa.neurogamer.com/wc98*.

POWERPLAY WORLD CUP TIPS

Andrew Humphreys (Rolling Stone)

Forget Italy and Brazil. Forget the English. Don't forget Germany just yet, but put your money on Holland up against Romania in the final. Why? Why the hell not? Italy unfortunately lack the venom of recent years and the Brazilians are too prone to hissy fits and lapses in concentration. Not so the Dutch, with top class strikers such as Bergcamp and Obermars up front, nor the Romanians - who won all of their qualifying games convincingly and went close to glory in 1994. Sure the Romanians are aging, but with creative midfielders such as Hagi (just like the Great Hagi in I Dream of Jeannie, he's the king of the conjurers) and Dan Petrescu and a solid defence, they'll give every team they play an almighty shake. Special tip: watch out for a kamikaze-style attack by hordes of crazed Belgian cream-pie throwers, possibly from the air, during the half-time break.

FIFA 98: It's been said before, but it is worth saying again;
1. TCP/IP play
2. dedicated game matching server. PLEASE!

Championship Manager

FIFA has the crown of the action football games, but there's more to life than just that. The complex world of football management has been a feature of computer games for just as long, and have a dedicated following. Among the best of the lot is the Championship Manager series, the latest instalment of which is CM 97/98. There are plenty of football management sims around, many of which feature a much prettier and dynamic interface, but CM is by far the strongest in terms of realism and depth of playability. Its archaic DOS style interface, with no graphic representations of the games, and only a line of text describing what's 'happening' on the pitch belies the power and depth of this magnificent game. It's developed a strong following online - and believe it or not, there are people dedicated enough to release updated data files each week, keeping track of all transfers, player injuries, management changes and so on.

Places of interest on the web for updated data files, as well as other third party utilities and such include http://members.xoom.com/cmcentre, which holds heaps of info, files, news and tips for the game. But there are literally hundreds of CM fan pages out there, and a search for championship manager from any search engine should be enough to get you started. The official home of CM is at *www.compulink.co.uk /~champman*, and there's also a very nice section on

POWERPLAY WORLD CUP TIPS

David Wildgoose

What's going to happen in the World Cup? Well, Scotland will win. Obviously. Several things always happen in World Cup football. One, people always say this will really be the year for African football - but no African team will make it past the quarter-finals. Two; the dull, predictable European team will always beat the flamboyant, charismatic South American or African team in the knockout stage. Three, at least one South American player will either test positive to drugs or get shot after arriving back home (or possibly both). Four, every commentator will remark upon the naivety of every Asian team at least six times during every match. Five, the final will be decided on penalties (and everyone will complain, but nothing will be done about it).

The Perfect Football Game

While it's true that football sims are getting closer to reality, there's still a ways to go, and it's not even clear if we really want reality from a football game anyway. It seems, from the people I've spoken to, that the actual physical properties of the players, the ball, and the AI is important, though it's not paramount. Most important is the feel of the game; if a football game can make you think as though you were the player you're controlling, if you needed tactics that would take place on a real pitch, and if there was a full set of management options, accurately recreating the real world of football. It's a bit of a bind really, either you go to FIFA 98 for a great playing experience, tainted by the crap management screens - or you go to CM for the incredibly detailed and realistic game world and put up with the archaic interface. So what's the answer? Combine the two! There's your perfect football game, for sure.

Think about playing with the power, versatility and complexity of Championship Manager. Selecting the team you will manage, selling and buying players as you see fit, dealing with player form, injuries, fitness and financial problems - and then when it's match day, FIFA kicks in and you're off into the middle of a game that accurately reflects your actions in the management arena. How incredibly cool would that be? I know, I know, it's a pipe dream, but I think I'd settle for EA getting their act together, forgetting about making their management interface pretty and making it FUNCTIONAL. Thankyou.

POWERPLAY WORLD CUP TIPS

Gareth Jones

It's unimaginative, I know, but I'm betting on a replay of the last WC final- Italy v Brazil. The scenario plays out something like this; Robbie Baggio earns a call back to the national team and immediately promises to grow his pony tail back. In the final, an early goal on the break by Italy scored by Inzhagi isn't answered until late in the final period by Ronaldo, a spectacular volley that sends the match into extra time. During extra time, Roberto Carlos has a free kick from well inside his own half which swirls and bends, and then turns almost at right angles, cracking against the goalpost with the keeper beaten. Italy scramble the ball away, and it comes down to penalties. Then...it's all up to Baggio again, but he has a nervous breakdown and can't take the penalty. Brazil win by default, and Baggio leaves Italy in disgrace, never to return. He moves to Australia and closes out his career playing for Marconi, never taking a penalty again.

the next in the series, the eagerly anticipated CM3 (expected to be released sometime late this year). Apart from an updated interface (though there still won't be a graphical representation of the game) and the latest teams and players, there will also be even more depth to the gameplay - making for an even more realistic sim. If you're a football fan and you're yet to enjoy the pleasure of taking control of your favourite club and sacking all those substandard players, then this is the sim to get. There are others, and mostly they're quite good, but none can match the depth or playability of CM. Actua has their Premier Manager series, which has a very spiffy graphical representation of the games, and FIFA has FIFA Soccer Manager but while there is plenty of depth to it, it just can't quite compete with Championship Manager.

So, that's the top of the crop at the moment. FIFA 98 and Championship Manager 97/98 are as good as it gets for football sims. Between the two of them there should be enough to keep you interested during those interminable half time breaks, as well as keep you awake and alert until the wee hours of the morning when the real France '98 games are being played. For a look at the future though, turn your glance over the page, where you'll see previews of three of the upcoming football games - the future looks bright indeed!

(left, top & middle) CM3 - the world's best football game is about to get even better!
(left bottom) FIFA Soccer Manager is good, but just can't compete with CM's depth

POWERPLAY WORLD CUP TIPS

Ben Mansill

Soccer schmoccer. What's wrong with you people? You're all wasting valuable life-time with this silliness, when you could be either A. Watching Formula 1 live, B. Watching Formula 1 videos, C. Playing a Formula 1 game, or C. Checking out Formula 1 www sites. Soccer... Ferchrissakes! Pick up the ball, push someone over and run for the try-line. Now that's football. I can't believe I let Gareth talk me into this feature... Coming soon: Formula 1 games compared!

The free files.

As with the Quake feature we did a while back we're including a smattering of files for you to use with these wonderful football games. Most files come with a readme attached, so have a look through that for installation instructions. And this time, we promise that the files will actually be on the CD too!

FIFA 98 Files:

Fifartwc.zip - The demo of FIFA 98. Non playable, but extremely pretty.
Fifav130.exe - The EA patch which fixes, among other things, Goalkeeper intelligence and the 'catch up logic' bug, as well as providing native support for a variety of new graphics cards.

Third Party mods and addons

Most of these files will overwrite existing data files for FIFA 98, so be sure to read the readme, and to backup files that you may want to keep.

Leagues

Aussieleague.zip - An almost fully up to date Ericsson Cup, though it overwrites the Swedish league.
Uefacup.zip - Replaces the World Cup teams with European teams, to Emulate the UEFA Cup
Super14.zip - Just like the Super 12's Rugby, except with 14 teams from Australia and South Africa.

Jerseys

Ita_jers2.zip - Updates the jerseys for most Series A teams.
Chelseajers.zip - Updates Chelsea's jersey
Realmjers.zip - Updates Real Madrid's jersey
Astonvjers.zip - Updates Aston Villa's jersey
Westhamjers.zip - Updates West Ham's jersey
premjers.zip - Updates most English Premier league jerseys
lpjers.zip - Updates mighty Liverpool's jersey
mufc.zip - Updates nasty old Manchester United's jersey.

Boots

Adidascopa.zip - changes the boots of the players so that they wear Adidas Copa boots (Just like mine in real life. Tops!)

Stadiums

Austad.zip – An update for the SFS

Misc

Liverscreens.zip - Changes the background screens to Liverpool pics
Beachcc.zip - changes the indoor court to a beach setting
street.zip - Changes the indoor court so that it's a street setting. Cool!

Utilities

Fah.zip - An editing utility to help you make jerseys, adboards and so on
gfxtal.zip - A small utility to help make jerseys and so on
xfxview_pak_snd.zip - another FIFA file viewer and modification tool.
fadg8.zip - The best utility for FIFA 98. Easy to use, powerful and a very functional interface

Actua Premier Manager Files

pm3ddemo.zip - The demo

Championship Manager Files

eng9798.zip - the demo version of the latest version of CM
patch.zip - A patch to fix a few inconsistencies in the retail version

FIFA Soccer Manager Files

fifamgr.exe - The demo version

World Cup '98

Now's the season to be soccer. Now that you're all fired up about the genre, here's some games...

Category	Football Sim
Players	1-TBA (No TCP/IP)
Publisher	EA Sports
Available	June 98

When is an add-on not an add-on? When it's World Cup time, of course!

Most people's first thoughts upon realising just what this game is would probably run along the lines of 'this is just a tacky attempt to sell some vaguely updated copies of FIFA 98 to people enthused by the showings of the World Cup'. But it's not, not really. Well, ok, maybe a little bit, but World Cup '98 looks to have enough new and updated features to make it a decent game in its own right.

Not FIFA 99

It's not FIFA 99, lets get that out of the way right from the start. FIFA 99 is a totally separate game, this is more of an addon-style affair for FIFA 98. But it's not an addon, you won't need FIFA: RTWC to play the game, and even though it's only concerned with the final teams for the World Cup (no leagues, no qualifying stages, etc), there should be enough to keep people happy for a while - especially football sim fans. Why? Well, because a number of problem areas within FIFA 98 have been addressed, not the least of which is the intelligence of the goalkeepers. In FIFA 98, even post-patch, keepers had a disturbingly erratic tendency to just do stupid stuff like standing over the ball and doing nothing until an opposition player wandered over and popped the ball in the goal, at which point the keeper would make a despairing dive only to miss the ball by at least three feet. Tres annoying! With the beta version that I had for this preview, I was very pleased to note that the goalies seem to know what they're doing this time around, and have also been given some impressive capabilities too - with the aim being to try to reflect real life games. Rather than have a 7-4 scoreline for a 10 minute game, with WC '98 you should see scores more like 2-1 and so on (though hopefully not 0-0).

And management!

But that's not all! One of the most annoying aspects of FIFA 98 was the management screens. Changing team formations around was ridiculously torturous, and moving players around the pitch was almost impossible due to the view that you were given. Sure it looked pretty, but it was stupidly dysfunctional, and thankfully WC '98 management screens don't look quite as impressive but they are a lot more functional. Essentially, the options have remained the same - you can change formation, player positions, and so on, but one addition is the ability to change formations and positioning on the fly during a game. During the setup phase, you set hot keys for three formations you might want to use and during a game if you want to change it's as simple as hitting that hotkey. Nothing earth shattering, but a nice touch nonetheless. And another nice touch is the championship teams of yore which will become available to play as or against once you've conquered the World Cup proper. These teams will include players such as Pele, George Best, Zico, and so on - and the games will be played in 'authentic' sepia toned black and white for that oh so important 'realistic' look and feel, though to be honest I'm not so sure how great this is going to be.

In terms of football games though, WC 98 looks to be the goods. It's got the FIFA 98 pedigree, it's got functional and useful management screens, improved AI, and a slightly improved response time from controllers too. In the long term, the limitations of single player games might prove to be a bit of a drawback (i.e. World Cup only), but still, it's one game I'm certainly looking forward to.

Gareth Jones

Note the drop-down menu style, a'la Windows 95. A bit worrying that

Championship Manager 3

Category	Football Management
Players	1-lots (hotseat)
Publisher	Eidos
Available	late 98

They don't have the financial backing of, say, your EA Sports team, and they don't have a huge profile outside of dedicated football fans, but Oliver and Paul Collyer have managed to create and maintain what is by far the most advanced and most enjoyable football management sim anywhere in the world. Championship Manager 2 was, at the time, an astounding release. The level of detail and authenticity was amazing (and still is), and with the update version, CM 97/98, the brothers Collyer continued the excellence. But it's CM3 that everyone is waiting for because it promises to be the next paradigm leap in management sims, with a nice updated interface (with windows style drop down menus...a trifle worrying), more management options, more teams to manage, and bucketloads of more features.

Although CM 97/98 and CM2 were great, you were limited in what you could do with your players on the field. Apart from letting them know where they should make their runs and what their position was you just had to leave them to their own devices. It was very annoying when you would play against a team with a dangerous forward - you couldn't set one of your defenders (or two) to mark him man to man - but with CM3 you will be able to do so, thankfully. Along with this, you will also have control over the training of your team (something that has featured prevalently in other management sims) as well as having to deal with the media and you will need to take notice of your club's supporters also. Along with individual player assignments on the field, it's the training phase that's been sorely missing from the Championship Manager series, up until now (apart from the graphical representations of games, but I'm beginning to repeat myself here). Until CM3, the only way to improve your players performance was to keep putting them in the first team, in the hopes that they would 'get the hang of it' eventually. Even given FIFA Soccer Manager's incredibly annoying interface, the training aspect of the game was excellent, allowing you to schedule different types of training on different days for individual players, the aim being to keep them at their best (and improving in their weak areas) while not exhausting them or aggravating injuries before their games. There's not that much detail about just what you will be able to do regarding training in CM3, but rest assured it will be part of the game. Lets just hope that it's nice and detailed, but with the Collyer Brothers' reputation for excellence and commitment to quality, it's almost a given that it will be.

CM3 won't be out until late this year, and it's going to be a while before any real graphical enhancements are made (though the 'retro' look is a large part of the charm of the CM series), but still, this is going to be the management sim to have this Christmas, unless something disastrous happens.

STATE OF PLAY

With our finger on the pulse of the games scene, we bring you the word on the throbbing life-force of your favourite game-style.

Adventure/RPG

David Wildgoose

Rejoice, my adventuring friends, the drought has ended! Ready for release throughout this year is a veritable waterfall of new games.

On the RPG front, there's Baldur's Gate from Interplay. With Diablo-style visuals, an emphasis on hard-core depth, and the option for co-operative multiplay, this should be a killer title. Ultima IX has copped plenty of criticism lately, mainly for allegedly dumbing down the great Ultima tradition. Variously tagged "Ultima Raider" or "Super Avatar Adventures", UIX is flirting with danger if it alienates those who made the series a success. I await it with a healthy mix of scepticism and interest. Thievery is the main game in Looking Glass' decidedly original Dark Project, while

Bethesda's Redguard casts you as a swashbuckling pirate. Sierra will stretch their Quest For Glory series to a fifth chapter, this time adding a noteworthy multi-player option. Of more immediate concern is Might & Magic VI, which is due out in the US any day now.

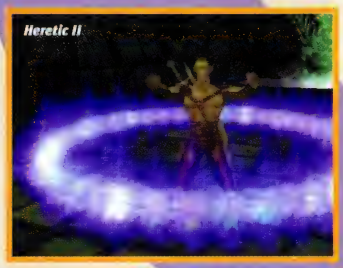
Onto adventures, and Tribal Dreams, having just completed Of Light & Darkness, will return with Star Trek: Secret Of Vulcan Fury. Based on the original series, it will allow you to play the roles of the six main characters, Kirk, Spock, et al. Motion capture looks cool, though the ads we've been seeing with other Interplay releases have been annoying. Sanitarium is a disturbing and freaky looking isometric adventure set in an asylum, from Dreamforge. Blizzard continue the Warcraft saga with Lord Of The Clans, but as yet has no firm release date. Sierra's best and most underrated adventure series, Gabriel Knight, moves into its third instalment, abandoning FMV Hell and rewarding us instead with sumptuous three-dimensionality. Expect a winter release. Also from Sierra later this is King's Quest 8: Mask Of Eternity. Now incorporating action elements, KQ8 will also be the first Sierra adventure to use 3D acceleration. Good grief, whatever next!

How about Grim Fandango? Lucasarts latest comedy opus, and yet another game going down the 3D road - this time with devilishly modelled, undead characters. Grim is my pick for 98, for all the usual reasons. Dark horse? How about Liath, another cinematic third-person 3D game, this time from little known developers Project Two. It just looks gorgeous, as you can see for yourself above.

Action

George Argy

Last month was a month of disappointment. All the hot games that were supposed to be on our shelves were delayed and all we get are some more pretty screenshots. As Jerry McGuire would say, show me the money baby. Well we ain't seen the money yet but we have seen that: Unreal isn't here; Prey isn't vapourware only because the developers say it isn't; there's talk of Daikatana II using the Unreal engine when the first game (using the Quake II engine) is nowhere near completion; and Riot and Half-Life are still a bunch of screenshots on a website. What is out though is Forsaken and it blows anything else out of the water because it's here and it's tops (check out the review). AmigaQuake

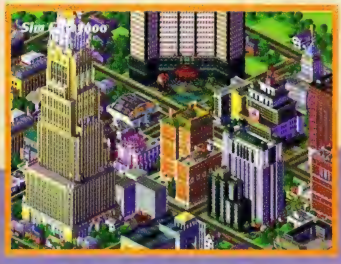


looks like it may be a reality soon which is good news for Amiga owners. The bad news is that there are still people out there who own an Amiga. Heretic II, the sequel to Heretic (that's right, Hexen was apparently not the sequel to Heretic but a different game with a similar name) is currently under development slated for a Christmas release, as is probably every other cool game. There's a lot of controversy surrounding this title because Raven have chosen to go 3rd person view instead of 1st person. Time and public demand will tell if they buckle and offer a choice between the two, but if they don't they will probably lose a large majority or '1st person only' type players who feel obstructed by having a player model in their view. In Quake news, the Quake 2 mission pack 'The Reckoning' should be out by the time you have this in your hot little hands, and it looks very juicy indeed with new weapons, enemies and tons of new maps and all are multiplayable. Version 2.40 of Qoole, the Quake Object-Oriented Level Editor, is out and includes support for all Quake II textures and entities for the most common add-ons including CTF and Jailbreak. A reasonably dry period for action games while we hold our breath and wait for the big 'uns.

Strategy

Peter Sharpe

Starcraft is out! At last! We'd like to spank the Blizzard boys for the late release, but since the game is a beaut we'll forgive them and just get on with arguing who's the best side to play with in multiplayer. For some sideline entertainment jump onto the Net and check out the pc.games.strategy newsgroup which is indulging in a predictable TA vs Starcraft pissing in the wind contest. Whether this latest in never-ending babbling can reach the pointless heights of the Warcraft2 vs C&C, Quake vs Duke3D or TA vs Dark Reign debates is yet to be seen. Remember it's not who's genitals are the biggest..oops I meant game is the best, the aim is to just have fun playing them all. Lucasarts are really in Star Wars mode of late. First we had Rebellion



their MOO2 type offering which was good, but oh what a stinky interface. Now along comes Force Commander, a full on RTS game. Take command of either the Rebel scum or the harshly judged Empire in a building and fighting clickfest over numerous worlds in the Star Wars universe. Seems 3D acceleration is going to be a requirement for the multi-viewpoint terrain, not just a luxury. Sounds drooly drooly.

SimCity 3000 will make an appearance around August, which will get all the amateur city planners panting heavily. It was originally planned that the player could zoom in and watch the city living and breathing from any viewpoint but to stop the title from hitting vapourware status and appearing sometime next century the feature has been officially dropped. Maxis are pumping as much detail and graphical goodies into the standard isometric view, and SimCity 3000 is shaping up as a worthy sequel. On the cloak and dagger front, the much loved boardgame Axis & Allies seems to be at last heading to the PC. Hasbro are rumoured to be the developers but are being very hush hush at this stage. They are the board game to PC specialists so it should be smiles all round if they are indeed at the helm. Dungeon Keeper fans grab the Direct 3D patch, just don't weep too hard that there's no multiplayer (TCP/IP for starters) enhancements on the horizon. The other big download is the official TA map editor, easy to use perfect for pent up creative juices. Happy war-mongering until next month.

Sims

Maj. Ian Lindgren

First the bad news! Confusion reigns about what is happening with Flying Nightmares 2; don't hold your breath for this year! Secondly Activision's Fighter Squadron has been delayed until September, but I've included a great screenshot above to whet your appetite!

Microprose are planning two releases for October this year. A Falcon 4.0 mission disk based on the MiG29, and a sequel to Top Gun: Fire At Will to be known as Top Gun: Hornet's Nest. Hornet's Nest will be a "kick the tires and light the fires" type of game, and maintain the "Hollywood" fun spirit that was embodied in the Top Gun movie and Fire at Will. Once again you will be Maverick, this time flying an F/A 18 in 30

plus missions that are promised to be dynamic and include loud, shrapnel-throwing and awe-inspiring explosions.

On the F-16 front, Falcon 4.0 isn't the only Fighting Falcon simulation we have to look forward to in 1998. Virgin Interactive plans to release an F-16 game in the last months of the year to be named F-16 Aggressor.

Eidos are planning a Spring release of a Joint Strike Fighter expansion disk that will include a hypothetical Chinese aircraft; I'll try to find out more on this. Mindscape's Team Apache continues to develop with promises that all objects will be targetable and that the game engine will include the ability to have up to five wingmen. Beta reviewers are praising its sound effects to the max, and even comparing its quality to Jane's products. This will be good news if it comes off.

Patches, patches, patches! Patches have been released for Novalogic's F-22 Raptor, DID's F-22 Air Dominance Fighter and Eidos' Joint Strike Fighter. Ditto for Sierra's Red Baron II, but no 3Dfx support as yet. Great news for Longbow 2 fans; check out the patches pages at Janes and you will find an 86K Azerbijian 2000 Campaign patch. This adds a fantasy scenario in which the current Iranian equipment found in the Azerbijian campaign is replaced by modern, state-of-the-art Russian hardware. This will seriously test even the most skilful Longbow 2 pilot.

Online

Gareth Jones

Well, I'd love to say that it's a boom period for online gaming, but the truth is that there just isn't all that much that's new and fantastic around the traps. Ultima Online is still rolling along, there's still no news on a local server, and those of us here in Oz still have to log on at 2am just to get a decent ping. Great.

However, there are a couple of interesting new developments, the first of which is Guinea Piggyland (www.piggyland.com). The scenario is that you're a pig whose task it is to make your fortune in piggyland by participating in a free market economy with other pigs (i.e. players), selling, trading, and generally trying to make as much money as possible. You'll need MSIE 3.2 or

higher to play, and it's nothing earth shattering, but there seems to be enough detail and interpersonal interaction to keep people interested, and it's fairly cheap too (around US$50 for a yearly subscription). I was fortunate enough to receive a beta testing CD to have a look at the game, but sadly I couldn't get the damn thing to work, so I can't tell you first hand about the actual gameplay. Maybe next month, with a bit of luck.

On the local front, Multiplay/TEN (www.multiplay.com.au) have rejigged their pricing schedule and are now offering a limited free service, where you can play Quake, shareware versions of Shadow Warrior and Duke Nukem, along with StarCraft and Diablo on the local Battle.net server for no cost. Along with this, subscriptions to the full Multiplay service, allowing access to all their games (including Q2, TA, Myth, Wiz War, and Red Alert) will only set you back 10 bucks a month. Since the prices have come down, there's been an influx of subscribers and players, so you should be able to find someone to play nowadays. Wireplay have seen the light as well, and have also reduced their prices to a flat $20 per month fee for unlimited play, with a similar influx of new players. If you've been wary of joining either services before it might be worth your while to take a second look - both Multiplay and Wireplay are starting to hit their straps, finally.

X-Files: the game

You doesn't mess with the X-Files unless you can deliver 100% quality. Thankfully the game keeps the faith.

Category	Adventure
Players	1
Publisher	Fox Interactive
Available	Soon

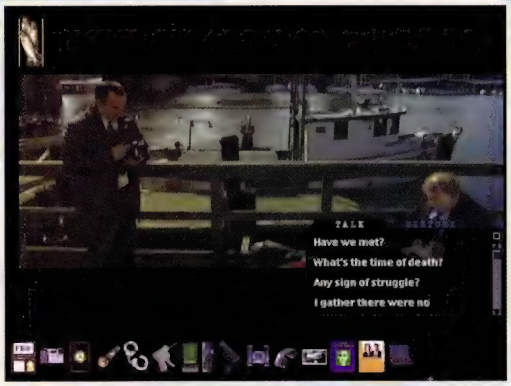
Derek dela Fuente spoke to the Vice President of development and production at Fox, Paul Provenzano, who explained that one of the prerequisites for making the game was getting David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson involved to convey the real ethos of the X-Files.

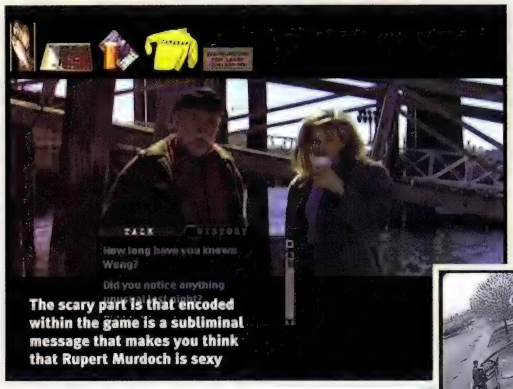
Respect for the show

Paul was at pains to point out no matter how inventive the team have been, gameplay must always be paramount - although the approach to the making of the game is very different from the norm. "As long as gameplay does not slow down or interrupt the flow, then all is OK." The presentation, which will come on 7 CDs, is all in FMV, through a letter box view with an interface box wrapped around this. It is this live footage that brings the game alive, with constantly changing camera angles and views, encompassed in 30 interesting locations. In effect, you are not getting one long FMV, with a linear plot and structured narrative, but a game with many fields and branches. It was interesting to find out that once the team had convinced David and Gillian to work on the game, they had a positive input in the way the camera shots were made and were continually suggesting differing vantage points so that the user would find things more aesthetically pleasing. Time was spent on shooting actions many times to find the best look, and if you consider that it took 7 weeks of filming, with most of the original team from the X-Files TV program (which includes actors and technical staff), you can see this is not merely working on a license for the sake of it. Nobody at Fox was obligated to work on the game, the gaming team had to convince everybody, as many were concerned that a bad game could alienate many of the TV viewers, but everyone was convinced in the end that the team had many ideas and techniques that would bring the appeal of the X-Files perfectly to the computer format!

Setting

The player does not play Mulder or Scully, but another agent. Most of the perspective is





The scary part is that encoded within the game is a subliminal message that makes you think that Rupert Murdoch is sexy

AUTHENTIC

The game world has many subtle references to the show. If you watch the TV program, you will find some of the objects, books, etc. littered around fascinating. Lots of objects that could have a bearing on the story, but in most cases merely interest, feature to give an even stronger X-Files feel. "The game is as bizarre as the show." You do not need to have watched the show but say you are playing the game and the Keystone Cops appear on a TC, then you will know what this means if you are a fan!", Paul.

REAL TIME

In the making of the game, the series was also being shot in a different location. To get Mulder and Scully into shoot their own parts the TV writers de-emphasised their parts so that they could be away for a period. There are certain episodes that feature Skinner, this is when the two actors were shooting the game scenes.

Is this a dagger I see before me? The truth is ... umm... somewhere. Trust no one. Except your Mum... And Dad... Grandparents are OK too...

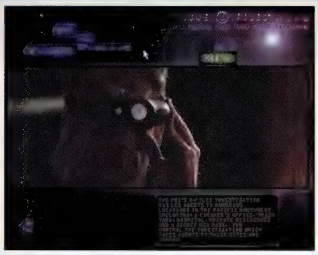
1st person but some will be 3rd person. The main objective is to find the two star agents. You will also be working alongside Skinner, and in order for him to trust you, you have to demonstrate you are worth it. If your attitude is wrong or you do not ask the right questions then he may withhold information and the game experience may let you get to a certain point, but not allow you to uncover other aspects if you are not doing the right things. The game, in effect, mirrors real life and depends upon the way you interact.

Interrogation

It was agreed that to play Mulder or Scully would not be acceptable to the player. People love the interaction between the two agents and so not to change the ethos we keep it this way and so you can interact with them and see them interacting together which is a fascinating experience.

The Game Is Out There

The team devised the scenario where you are an agent working in the Seattle field office. You are initially asked by Skinner to find Mulder and Scully because they have gone off course. The game is not all about finding the agents, this is just part of the process for you will be working with them at some point and this changes the whole direction of the game. Just like the show, the game is like an onion skin where you can keep peeling off layers, getting more info, but then you'll want to ask even more questions. Ultimately, just when you feel you have reached the bottom layer, you end up finding there is more! "There are so many equations, you may find Mulder and Scully not talking to you, they may kill you, you may kill them! It is a very complex set of parameters that have been devised," added Paul.



Pick and Click

"There are two ways to play the game, one for the fan and one for the adventure player. To do this we have established artificial intuition which allows someone who does not understand the genre of adventure games an easy understanding of the objectives by supplying clues. This could come in the form of narrative, etc. this option can be turned on or off. There are also many subliminal messages which are even more abstract and this is to focus you into a certain way of thinking. It is really subtle but it is there and can be turned off.

X-Facts

Fact 1 Duchovny and Anderson were so impressed with the game they actually spent their own time in coming back to give extra help!

Fact 2 The game from start to near completion has already taken over 2 and half years!

Fact 3 Playing the game is like the real thing. Time is important so things will change if you do not reach a certain location or achieve things within a time period!

Fact 4 The time it will take a player to compete just one version can't be calculated. When our play testers run through the game, knowing what to do, it would take them more than 40 hours.

Fact 5 The design document for the X-Files game was over 900 pages. Dialogue is 280 pages. Scripts for the locations and navigation is 600 pages.

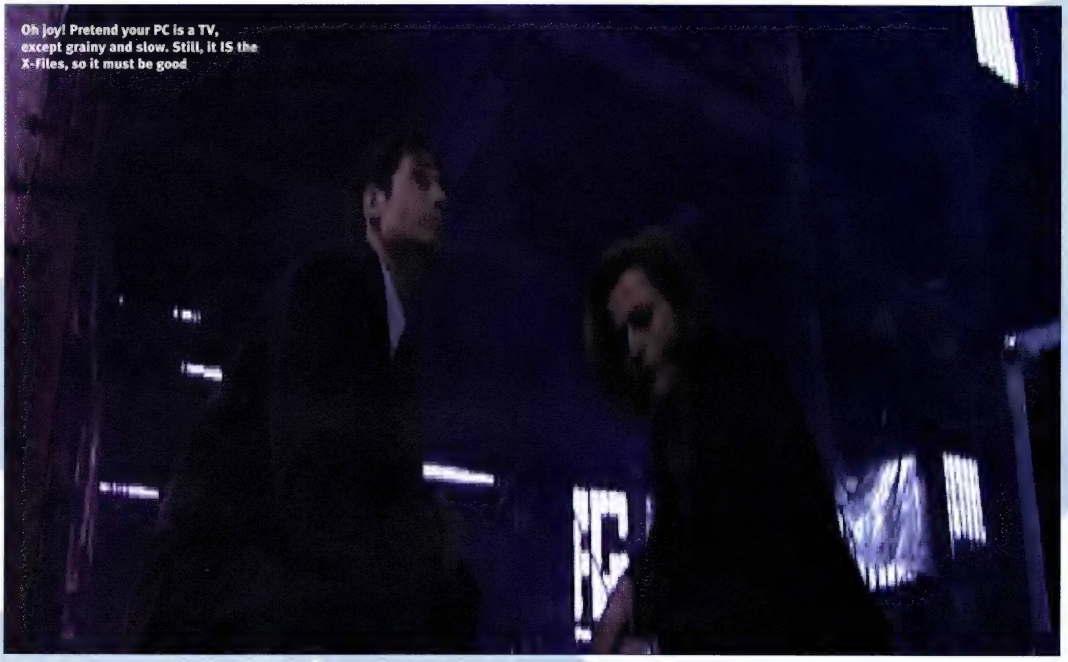
Fact 6 X-Files will be localised into many different languages with the same actors that dubbed the voices in the TV series!

Fact 7 David owns his own computer, whilst Gillian spend lots of time at the arcade as she loves games!

Fact 8 Millennium the TV series, is also a possibility of being turned into a game.

Fact 9 Fox utilise outside developers so they can pick and choose the best for each individual style of game they are working in, hence no in house development!

X-Files The Game



Oh joy! Pretend your PC is a TV, except grainy and slow. Still, it IS the X-Files, so it must be good

Category	Adventure
Players	Single Player
Publisher	Fox Interactive
Available	Soon

Considering X-Files fandom has become one of the sub-cultures of the 90's it's surprising that a game based on the adventures of foxy Mulder and sexy Scully hasn't appeared earlier. No longer will X-Philes be constrained to indulging their devotion by collecting fake nudie pictures of Gillian Anderson off the Net or pretending they are in an episode by lurking around the local shopping centre carpark on foggy nights waiting for Deep Throat to make an appearance. X-Files the game is being promoted as a fully interactive episode, which leads to the potential dreaded words of gaming horror, "Interactive Movie". Eeek shriek howl! Fear not, as the production values of the game look top notch with series creator Chris Carter penning an original storyline for the game. This is not some bodgy knockup using a video camera and crap bluescreen environments, the production talent behind the show is behind the game. Using

some sort of new wanky swanky technology called VirtualCinema 3.0, X-Files fans are promised lots of movies, combined with a mixture of first and third person views as they investigate the branching plot lines. Some sort of advanced artificial intelligence will have computer-controlled characters reacting realistically to your actions, yeah right we've heard that one before - but fingers crossed this time around.

Our preview disc showed Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny shooting new scenes around spooky abandoned buildings and smokey FBI rooms, those being only a few of the 30 locations in the game. One disturbing preview movie had Mulder and Scully cornered in a warehouse by some evil government doers with one of the famous pair taking a bullet. Suddenly a light shines, bad guys are heard screaming followed by a fadeout and the X-Files TV series intro. Oooh ahh.

The sexually frustrated TV duo play the role of helpers in the game, with the player jumping into the shoes of junior FBI field agent Crag Willmore. Expect to bump into series regulars such as baldy man Skinner, the troublesome trio of the Lone Gunman and your nemesis the Cancer Man. All cynicism aside concerning interactive movies there's some real potential here. Under a Killing Moon dragged the whole movie/game thing out of the mud and the X-Files mythos is the perfect melting pot for moody atmospheric visuals and an immersive storyline. Will Scully be cured of Cancer? Are the Lonegunmen just a bunch of Pizza addicted nerds with good computers, and will Mulder finally find out that there is a secret link between his addiction to pornography and little green men? The truth will be with us soon when our review gets to the bottom of this insidious conspiracy.

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Alien Earth

Category	Adventure
Players	1
Publisher	Beam Software
Available	2nd Quarter '98

So you think planet Earth isn't in the best shape at the moment? Asian economic meltdowns, that's nothing! Pass the credit card please. A demented alcoholic in charge of the world's second biggest nuclear arsenal, no probs. Boris try some Vodka and orange to settle the nerves. The real troubles hit when the nukes start flying, and the world is plunged into a new horrific dark age of tribalistic violence and a distinct lack of dial up pizza! Being that humanity is at rockbottom, enter the evil alien Rasksha who see a very big job opening for the new enslavers of planet Earth. With all of mankind grovelling and worshipping mysterious "ancient" technology like phonebooths, it's time for one man to make a difference. Given the boot from your village armed only with wooden stick and having only a few hours before an alien lord starts hunting you down, seems as good as time as any to destroy the alien menace and liberate Earth. Fairly typical adventure game type plot, but the graphics are looking tasty and it's made by Aussie gaming gurus Beam Software.

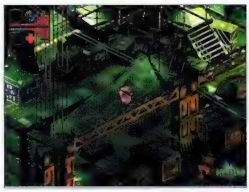
Local stars Beam tackle the traditional adventure game & give it the old post-apocalyptic treatment

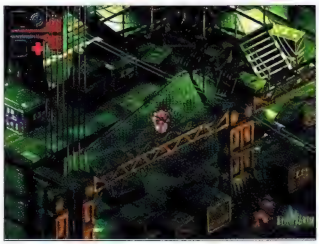
Not frustrating at all...

Mostly famous for their real time strategy effort KKND (sequel on it's way real soon), the guys have decided to take a hand to the adventure/action format. Not their first time either, for many SNES owners will remember Shadowrun which was a pretty good game back in the 16 bit console days. With all the increased memory and graphics power of the PC the boys at Beam are looking to make an engrossing adventure that's far from painful to the eye. In the late beta we got to play around with, graphics were the standout. The pre-rendered monsters and environment look much bigger and more detailed than even Diablo's nasty denizens. Speaking of Diablo, Alien Earth uses a very similar style of combat, namely point and click the mouse to attack. Unlike Diablo and much more like other traditional isometric viewpoint adventures there's chatting to various characters, object orientated puzzles and an expanding plot. Speak to the mad old hermit man and grab the cigarette lighter. Combine bottle, old rag and petrol. You now have a Molotov Cocktail which gains access past previously impassable post-nuclear mutant monster. Lots of this sort of stuff, good for some late night lateral thinking. Seems one almighty cock-up could make it through the design process though, and for gamers everywhere a plea must be made at this point. Being able to only save your game at certain designated points along the way completely and utterly sucks the big one. Nobody likes dieing and having to go back 30 mins to a previous save game, it's frustrating and a universally hated feature. Fingers crossed that this wart of an idea is for our beta preview only.

We'll hand Alien Earth over to one of our adventure hungry (starved at the moment) reviewers when the real deal full version lands on our desk. Up until then we might sit back and get used to the novelty of hearing Aussie accents in a post-apocalyptic world. Here we were thinking only Americans would survive into the next century, perish the thought.

Pete Sharpe





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Motorhead

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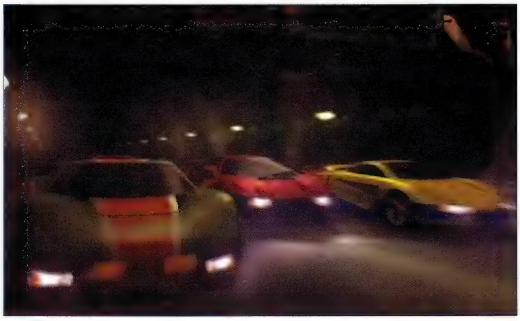
Category	Arcade racing
Players	Gremlin Interactive
Publisher	1-8
Available	Late April

Remember venturing into the arcade and laying eyes on Ridge Racer or Daytona for the first time? Being the first graphically gorgeous arcade racers it was seen as the birth of a new genre of super-driving games leaving behind the days of crap looking things like Pole Position. Then came the Playstation and a plague of Ridge Racer clones and you can't browse a demo disk or turn a corner without great graphics, fast japanese super cars and a timer counting down your lap time. All a bit ho-hum, but considering real life driving has become an experience of perpetual peak hour, those infernal roundabouts, and 40km speed limits, we need some sort of healthy venting for road rage. Motorhead c'mon down.



Lets forget any notion of accurate physics or realistic handling models, Motorhead is all about drop your pants graphics and a foot to the floor sensation of speed. The expectation of another Playstation race thingie type game probably isn't about to bump TOCA Touring Cars off the hard drive, but the preview version we played around with raised an eyebrow or two. On our ninja glow in the dark PII 266, the game flew along in high res with no hardware acceleration. No surprises there. Expecting a slideshow on our relatively doggy non-3dfx P166, lo and behold the game maintained mighty fine frame rates however, so it seems that the developers have done some pretty fine work on the game engine. This is with fancy pants lighting effects, smoke, quality texturing and even the odd Blade Runner car floating around as trackside scenery. The preview contained only a solo race around the track mode, so time will tell to what extent performance will be affected in the final version by the final version's computer cars with AI that "learns" as you race. Motorhead will support 3D cards and the word from Gremlin is that frame rates could reach higher than 60 fps, which to the human eye translates as insanely smooth.

While Motorhead is a Playstation/PC dual release, the PC version will be graced with multiplayer options, which is of course a good thing and indicative that the past horror days of non-enhanced Playstation ports getting dumped onto our beloved machines are fading into memory. Potential cheers all around.

Even at this early stage Motorhead has passed the hoon petrol head test - with the ability to easily go for 360 degree burnouts, fishtail down the road, complete with skidmarks, and witches hats that react realistically when you drive through 'em. Sadly all attempts to roll the car proved fruitless, which had all the anarchic drivers around the office sighing with a twinge of sadness - although going airborne at ludicrous speeds goes a long way to make up for it. We're hoping this upcoming racer holds our attention longer than an episode of Team Knight Rider, but look out for the full review coming soon.

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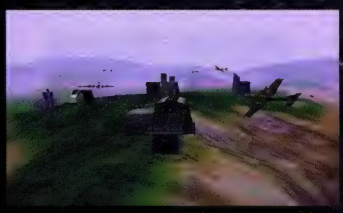

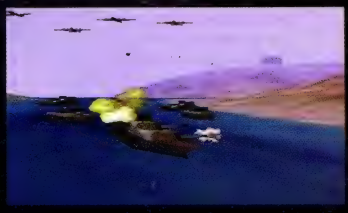

Produced by

Eyst

PC CD-ROM

3D ACCELERATED

Published by

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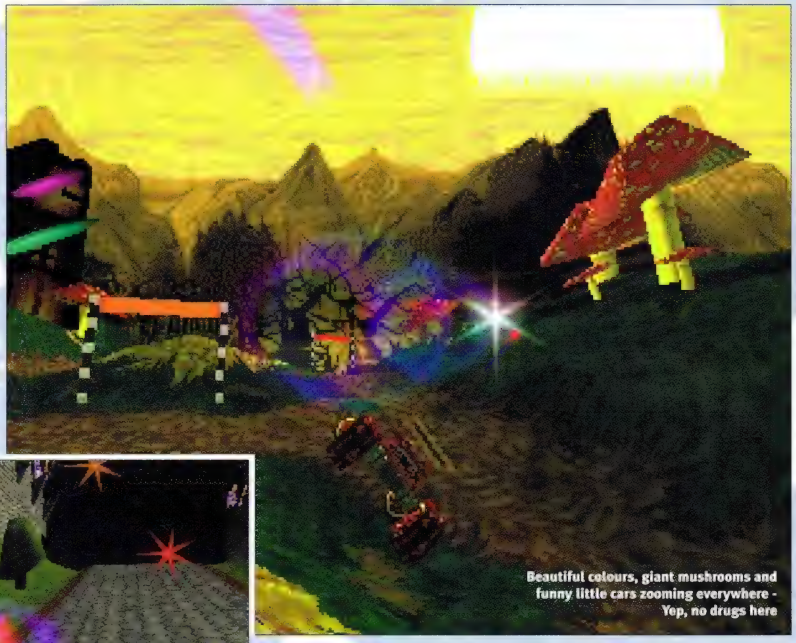
Buggy

Category	Little car racing
Players	1-?
Publisher	Gremlin Interactive
Available	2nd Quarter '98

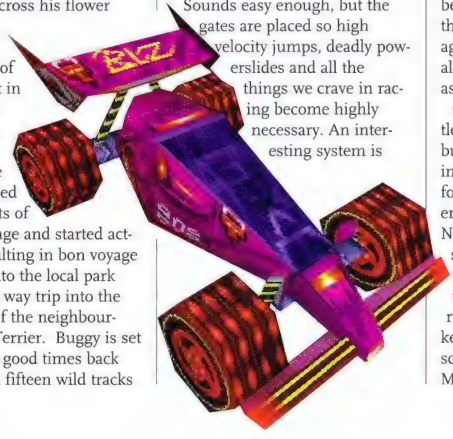
Racing games based on ballsy testosterone nitro injected bitumen melting speed machines are the usual fare, but lets not forget the "Cutesy" racers. MicroMachines proved that racing miniaturised cars around tabletop cutlery wasn't as silly as it sounds. Ignition was another cool game using the same little car theme, but still retaining the old top down perspective. Buggy might be based on cute small cars, but it sports a 3D engine that is usually associated with the more he-man racing games out there.



Beautiful colours, giant mushrooms and funny little cars zooming everywhere - Yep, no drugs here

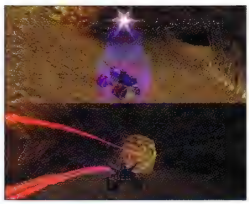
One of the big dream toys of youth is the radio controlled all terrain vehicle. Used for scaling the fearsome mountain of rocks in the backyard, testing out Uncle Joe's pacemaker with a quick powersprint across his flower garden or for measuring the top speed of your pussy cat in pursuit mode. Heaps of fun, especially when the little buggers reached the outer limits of their radio range and started acting oddly resulting in bon voyage ceremonies into the local park pond or a one way trip into the hungry jaws of the neighbourhood Pitbull Terrier. Buggy is set to bring these good times back complete with fifteen wild tracks and lots of pretty texturing and lighting effects going off everywhere. The general theme is to race your radio controlled beastie around the place successfully passing through marker gates.

Sounds easy enough, but the gates are placed so high velocity jumps, deadly powerslides and all the things we crave in racing become highly necessary. An interesting system is used for gaining powerups. Rather than the usual track placed icon to get a turbo boost, passing through "Rainbow" Gates produces colours. These colours act together in different combinations to produce all the necessary wacky speed boosts, super jumps etc. Some of these powerup gates will be placed in hidden zones throughout the courses, adding replayability in searching for the near perfect powerup combo. Sixteen vehicles are up for grabs, all with distinct handling and speed differences (and different paint jobs, remember pink cars go faster) although the emphasis for all sixteen is agility and the knack of keeping all four wheels off the ground for as long as possible.



Controlling silly little cars is a purpose built activity for inviting mates over for some multi-player yahoo fests. Network support and split screen are both goers. Ahh the sweet memories of sharing a keyboard in split screen Micromachines, shoulder barging for that first place across the finish line.

3D accelerator support is becoming a gimme these days for car games, and Buggy is no exception with support for PowerVR and 3DFX out of the box. MMX as well, well err...that's a nice addition. We'll bring you the bump and grind remote controlled review when the commercial release lands on our doorstep.



"It looks better than V-Rally..." Computer and Video Games.

"These cars shift like they're trying to go back in time..." PLAY.

"Visually it knocks the socks off the competition..." UK Playstation.

"Prepare yourself for silly speeds sometime around April..." PC Zone.

"MotorHead really is a breathtaking piece of programming..." Playstation Power.

"MotorHead"

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MotorHead possesses violent break-neck speed, ultra car handling and that 'rare' instant arcade appeal on both the PC and PlayStation. Power across Europe and the USA in the Transatlantic Speed League, in locations ranging from abandoned mining facilities to desolate downtown highways. Unlock further cars and tracks as you move up each of the racing divisions to becoming the Transatlantic Speed League Champion.

Racing Modes

Quick Race, Single Race, Multi-Player Race, League Race, Time Attack and Ghost Mode.

Graphics and Sound FX

The most realistic looking arcade-racing game ever: lens flare, sparks, smoke, skid marks, fog effects. Totally immersive sound effects and 10 'up for it' sound tracks.

PC CD-ROM Features

3D acceleration support
8-player local area network racing on PC CD-ROM.
Modem, Null Modem, IPX & TCP/IP support.
Lobby Chat System.

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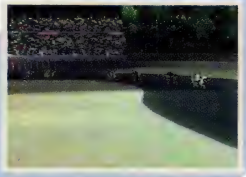
Castrol Honda Superbike World Champions

Realistic motorbike racing sims have always been a little thin on the ground - rejoice then, for Castrol Honda Superbikes is here to fill the void

Category	Motorbike sim
Players	1-6
Publisher	Metro Games
Available	3rd Quarter 98

It's been a long time coming, ever since Moto Racer appeared in our lives and completely altered our perceptions of just how good and how enjoyable a vaguely realistic motorbike simulation could be - but it seems as though we're finally going to have a serious (and good) one on our hands. The name is a bit of a mouthful, but it signifies that this game is coming with the approval of the real Honda Castrol Superbike team and so if nothing else the bikes and riders should be authentic, which is always a nice touch.

However, it's not just authentic names. Developers Interactive Entertainment have been hard at work recreating the mechanics



Superbike tends more to the arcade style than sim- which is what the world actually needs

and handling of the bikes themselves, and though we've only been able to take a look at a small demo version of the game, we can tell you that they're pretty much spot on so far. The bikes handle wonderfully - almost like the real thing. And unlike Moto Racer, and especially unlike Redline Racer, the opposition AI are well developed. They will actually dice for positions, come from behind, attempt overtaking manoeuvres and generally behave like real riders. We're not talking about AI that is nothing more than an obstacle, as with Redline Racer, we're talking about AI riders that have bikes just as fast as you, that take into account where you are on the track - and AI that wants to win too. Think TOCA AI drivers riding motorbikes, and you should get an idea of what we're talking about.

Customisable bikes

One of the few things missing from TOCA was the ability to get down and dirty with your car (oh please - get your minds out of the gutter people!)...by modifying the setup for particular racetracks, because we all know that different tracks require a differ-

ent setup for each car in real life. CHSWC recognises this, and allows for modifications to your bike for each race, depending on personal preference or the current race track. It's another nice touch, and when you add to this the in game help for novice riders, it means that there should be a decent learning curve, ensuring that there's both longevity in the gameplay as well as an interesting and exciting game for different levels of riders. What the help mode does is allow you to turn on helper functions such as braking assistance (where, obviously enough, your brakes are applied at the correct times whether you're pressing the brake button or not), or steering assistance (and that really requires no explanation, does it?), and so on.

Impressive if not spectacular grahics

And then, of course, there's the graphics. As we've come to expect from racing sims (bar a few of the ones from Sega..) the graphics are suitably impressive. Not quite as vibrant and jaw dropping as Redline Racer's, but they are still clean, clear, and the game moves along at an impressive frame rate too. In fact, the only thing that's standing in the way of this game receiving an ecstatic preview with the words 'we cant wait for this one, it looks tops!' plastered all over it is the driving model of the Beta. Now, in all likeliness this is just because the final driving model hasn't quite been tweaked properly yet, but in the demo we have been given the bikes do handle a little sluggishly. With the level of quality and professionality in all other areas of the game, it's an almost sure thing that the driving model will be made a little easier to deal with, and taking as a given that the game is striving for a high level of realism there just needs to be a slight fix for this, because handling a modern superbike isn't supposed to be an easy affair, after all.

Warning! This screenshot can make you dizzy! Do not stare at it for more than 15 minutes without taking a break

Every riders dream?

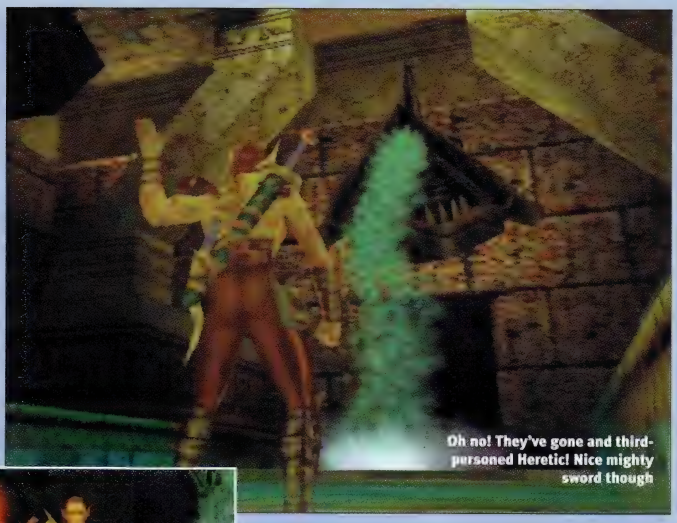
We don't know, as yet, just what tracks will be available or how the races will be organised, but we do know that there will be multiplay, although only via a LAN. And lastly, um, we're really not sure why it's such a big deal, but we're told that once you have completed the Championship you will gain access to an extra super special track - an authentic recreation of Honda's twinring Motegi test circuit, which no member of the public has ever had the chance to ride. Great! Well, even if you're not all that excited at the prospect of tooling around a test track, the actual game itself looks pretty damn good - we're starting to think of it as TOCA on two wheels, and it if lives up to that then this is one game to definitely watch out for.

Heretic II

Category	Action
Players	1-TBA
Publisher	Raven Software
Available	Christmas

Raven Software seemed to have fooled everybody. The general opinion being that Hexen was actually Heretic 2, which made Hexen 2 Heretic 3. All wrong, as now we are going to get Heretic 2, which is the true sequel to Heretic and not related to Hexen 2. Umm...that sorts everything out, doesn't it?. Where as the Hexen series of games centres around the Shadow riders mythology, Heretic 2 continues the saga of the original Heretic hero Corvus the Elf. The poor fellow got banished to some horrible dimension after defeating D'sparil in the first game. The banishing curse has been lifted but the land is now filled with villainy and naughty beasties. While Corvus always wanted to be a lumberjack, evil must be vanquished, and so thus the adventure begins.

Heretic 2 will use the Quake 2 engine, but this isn't going to be 'just another' 1st person actionfest. Think Lara Croft 3rd person over the shoulder viewpoint, but with the feature of being able to have more control over the camera's positioning. Combat veterans be advised that Tomb Raider's fairly weak autopoint combat model will not be a symptom of Heretic 2, replaced with a more specific aiming system. The big bonus of the over the shoulder look, is for dexterity based puzzles involving fun stuff like tumble rolls and climbing ropes rather than just hunt for the torturously hidden button a'la Hexen 2. It's early days yet though, and we'll keep you updated on this medieval tasty treat from the guys at Raven Software.



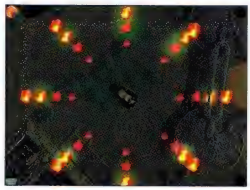
Oh no! They've gone and third-personed Heretic! Nice mighty sword though

Vangers: One for the road

Category	Action/Adventure/Racing
Players	1-TBA
Publisher	I-Magic
Available	June

Open ended gameplay is a term often thrown around in publicity blurbs, most of the time it doesn't really deliver. Vangers could well live up to the description and at the same time defy any simple categorizations cause it sounds so damn refreshingly wacky! The future contains great surprises for human society, the most important being the discovery of inter-dimensional travel. No longer were humans forced to live out a cruddy old boring existence on Earth. It was time to mingle with incredibly exotic beings which made for great intergalactic parties and restaurants but had the negative effect of forever fragmenting human society into clans across the vastness of this new reality. Nah it's not an RPG, or a 1st person shooter or anything that's easily pigeon holed. Vangers takes a top down viewpoint with the player controlling a vehicle, sort of like Micro-machines, but it's so very much more. Worlds have to be traversed with an open ended trading and exploration system that allows for, well...whatever takes your fancy. Trade with the aim of upgrading equipment on your all wheeled transport or ditch it for something like a helicopter. Meet new strange and wonderful biological gooey life forms or just explore the weird worlds on offer. Exploration should be a constant entertainment due to the use of a freaky voxel technology allowing a constant changing environment - from quicksand to mountains, and everything in between.

It's an understatement to say Vangers looks freaky, it's built to defy all the genre cliche's and is set to be a gust of fresh air. Psychedelic inter-dimensional voxel graphics review coming soon.



We don't fully understand the name - or even the game. Action/adventure/racing. OK?

Adrenix

Category	Shoot-em-up
Players	1-TBA
Publisher	Digital Dialect
Available	Soon

Looks like the world took a wrong turn at the dawn of the new millennium. Instead of a world community filled with fluffy loving and caring ideals inspired by the Sydney 2000 Olympics (insert cynical bastard smile here) humanity gets stuck with a war-torn crapped out Earth. America is ruled by a strict military regime that has decided drugs are coolies, as long as the drug of choice is Adrenix and the government is the sole supplier. Adrenix is a nasty substance that boosts the strength and endurance of soldiers, but has the unfortunate side effect of advanced death syndrome. Enter you the hero, all round govt military legend who has turned against big brother because they were silly enough to kidnap your daughter as an unwilling drug tester.

Think of Adrenix as a game with heavy Descent heritage. While the game style consists of piloting your ship through tunnels and other enclosed spaces, various missions take place around large cityscapes and other outdoor areas adding spice to the usual claustrophobia. As opposed to just trying to escape each level, 23 objectives have to be completed so as to rescue your daughter and provide the supposed 30 hours of gameplay.

Along the way expect over 25 different enemy vehicles and 700 different environment textures to keep the level variety and eye candy flowing.

Multiplayer options, and 3D accelerator support are welcomed but the biggest test for Adrenix will be coming up against the super Descent clone Forsaken that is one of the upcoming hot releases (see review on page 62). We'll give you the full rundown on Adrenix and how it fares against the competition when the full version arrives, hopefully next month.

Another 3D corridoor shooter along the same lines as Descent. Bring 'em on!

THE SCORE

2 Years of expert opinion, compressed. Take it shopping

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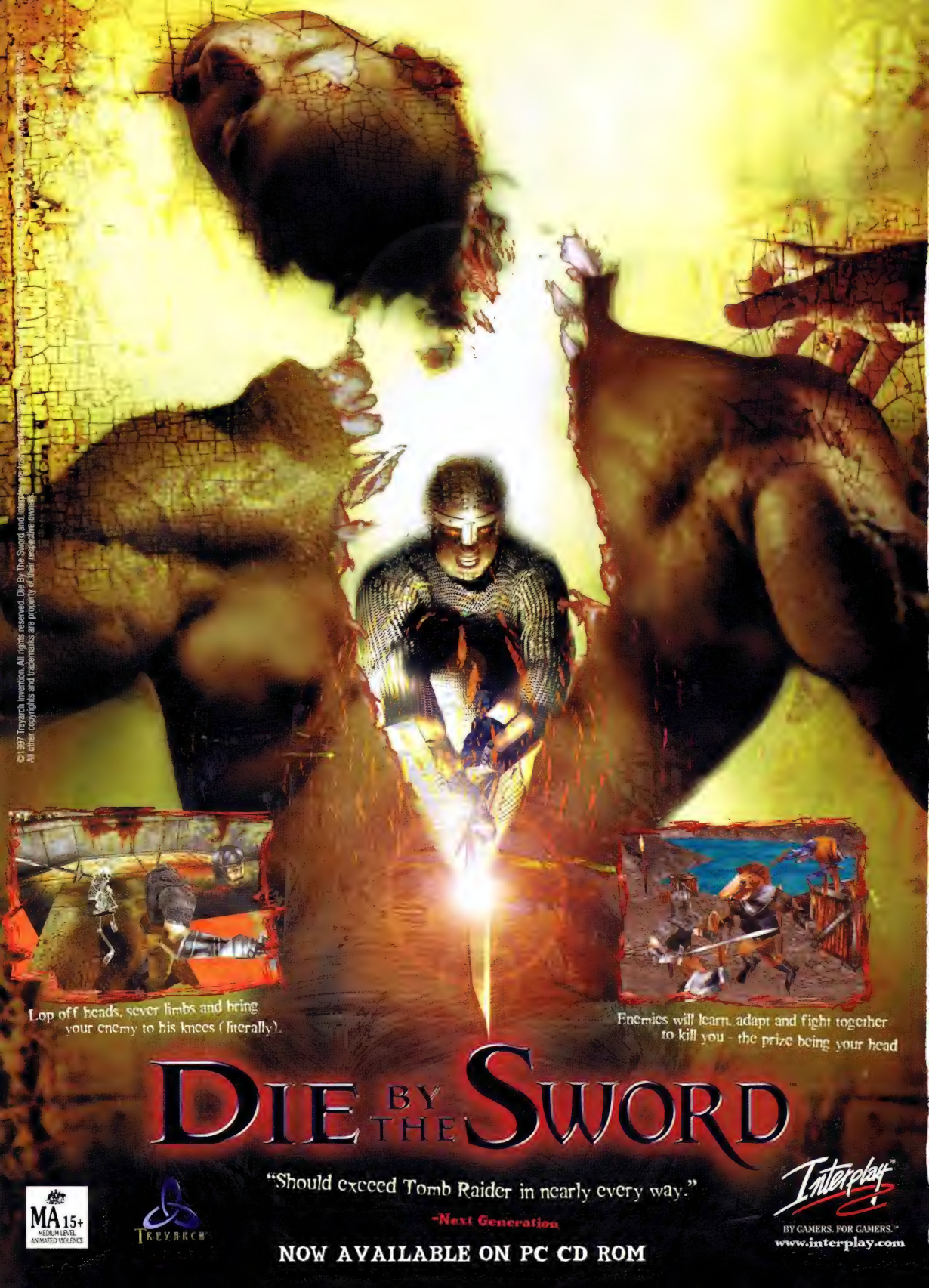

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REVIEWS

Great Expectations Fulfilled

The way of the game:

1. Word filters in of Hot New Game.
2. We dig, get info, get excited.
3. We do preview, you get excited.
4. 3 - 5 years pass.
5. Game finally shows up.
6. It's a dud.

Any gamer who has been around for at least a couple of years knows this routine, and have steeled themselves against the emotional grief this disappointment usually causes. Game developers can be real bastards sometimes...

A rare & special month of games

Doesn't it just give you a warm, fuzzy glow when they actually get it right! For this month, in just about every case, the games are just brilliant.

The safe bet was always Forsaken. It's got it all - graphics to die for, gameplay to live for and multiplay to kill for. Another little game that landed is Starcraft, you may have heard of it... We nervously installed, then played, then played, then remembered to sleep after a couple of days. Thank the gaming gods that Starcraft turned out to be as great as it is. Real Time Strategy is alive and well, thanks to Starcraft.

Our expectation for Die by the Sword were also very high - and have been met conclusively. Point and shoot 3D action games are finally beginning to wear thin and Die by the Sword shows there's a lot more that can be done with a 3D environment. Check out the Virtual Sword! Big fun!

Military sim fans are also doing high 5's. Jane's F-15 was only ever going to be the temporary medicine until Falcon 4.0 turned up - or so we thought. We only hope now that we've the time to play it through before the big one. Maybe the Big One will have to wait a bit... Also, MicroProse finally released Tank Platoon 2 and the thousands of old-time gamers who loved the original have much to celebrate.

As always though, there are a duds. Powerboat Racing is just one big fatal flaw. Hopefully this sad attempt at a new genre will peacefully sink. It just doesn't work.

All up though, this has been one of the all-time great months for games. I'm just grateful I've finished writing this page so I can get back to Starcraft! See you on Battle.net gamers!

Ben Mansill
Editor

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THE PC POWERPLAY SCORING SYSTEM

95%+	PLATINUM The Best. Virtually faultless, reserved for games which cause loss of sleep from thinking of nothing else.
90-94%	GOLD A classic. Either an unquestionable example of superiority within its genre, or a ground breaking game that'll be setting trends.
80-90%	A strong, eminently platable game. Hard to fault and likely to still be on the hard drive in 6 months time.
60-80%	Competant and generally enjoyable. Flaws or mediocrity hold these games back from higher ratings.
40-60%	Average and ordinary. Not bad, not good. Ideal gift
0-40%	Bad, really bad. Boring, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible

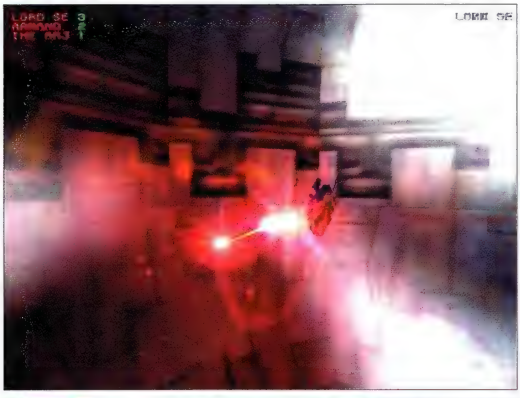
FORSAKEN

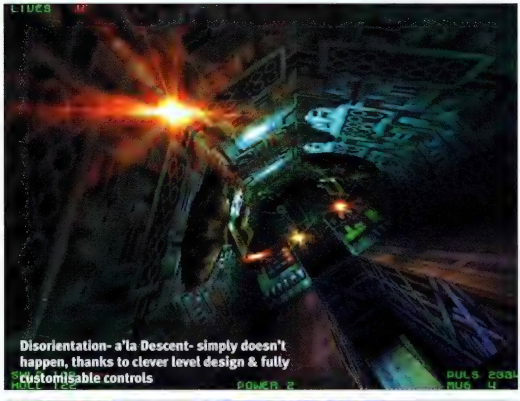
What you want in a game: **Golden gameplay, gorgeous graphics, magnificent multiplay, to be really, really cool.**
Where to get it: **Forsaken**

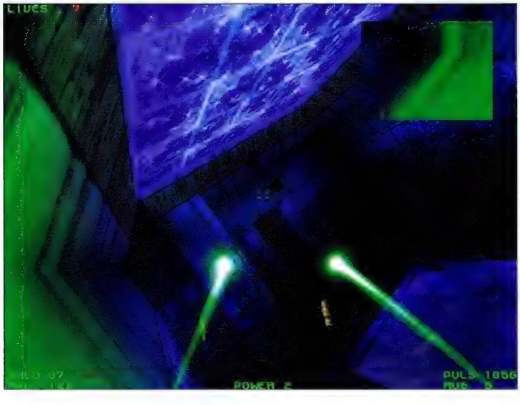
It's 4am the morning of deadline as I write this. Why? Because the evil, evil people at PC PowerPlay decided to give me Forsaken to review because they thought I just may like it. My life since receiving this little golden disc of 'mirth' has consisted of getting up at 7am, going to work, coming home as quickly as I possibly can, booting the PC, loading Forsaken and playing until some ungodly hour, passing out and then doing the whole thing over. Forsaken will do this to you, too.

There is plot!

It's quite simply the sexiest, smoothest, fastest, coolest 3D shooter in town. The story (like you care about stories in 3D shooters as much as the plot in a porn flick) goes like so: Some naughty scientists on earth were messing around with subatomic particles in order to be the first ones to write their names on an electron. Obviously this was doomed to failure and they ended up destroying the world. Now, centuries later, the earth has been condemned and any bounty hunter or mercenary can visit the planet and take







whatever souvenir they want. Of course, every other bounty hunter and mercenary has the same idea, so it's not exactly a walk in the park; more like a walk in a post-apocalyptic park with lots of big guns and deadly zero-grav bikes.

The Decent connection

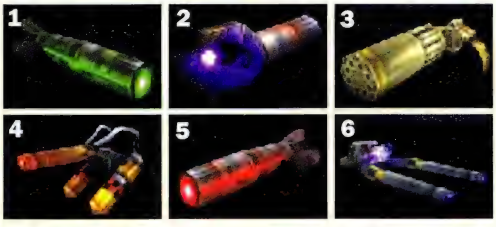
The comparisons to Descent will be inevitable, so I may as well indulge. Forsaken is basically Descent with a much faster engine, better graphics, sound and multiplayer options. The gameplay is almost identical, so those who loved Descent will get right into this. The levels are huge and challenging with heaps of enemies, traps and puzzles (good ones, not tear-your-hair-out Hexen II ones) to keep you occupied. Right about here is where the similarities to Descent end - stylistically, Forsaken is a quantum leap ahead.

Cutting edge 3D

I could go on and on about the graphics...and I will. The screenshots tell the story, but screen

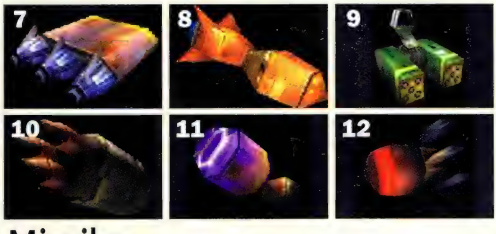
WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Forsaken gets the award for best looking weapons in a game, ever. Yes, they're bigger, better and badder than Turok (not surprising considering Acclaim published Turok too). The lowdown is thus:



Guns

1. Pulsar - The default energy weapon. Get a bigger one.
2. Trojax - Press the fire button and hold down. Release when charged. Kill beasty in your way.
3. Suss Gun - Like a high-spread machine cannon. Very nice.
4. Pyrolite Rifle - Awwwwright! I love the smell of napalm in the morning.
5. Transpulse - Shots bounce off walls until they hit an enemy. That'll be red2 in the corner pocket.
6. Beam Laser - Long range, instant beams of death. Great for curing cataracts too.



Missiles

7. MUG - Standard, non-guided rockets. Use as a last resort.
8. Scatter - Hit your enemy and cause them to drop their dacks....erm, ammo.
9. MFRL - Multiple Fire Rocket Launcher. Heaps of fun - fires cute little seeds of death real fast.
10. Solaris - Same as MUGs, but guided and larger payload. Ouch.
11. Gravgon - When this baby hits it creates like a black hole that sucks everything in and keeps it there.
12. Titan - The king of missiles. No explanation required.

Mines

13. Purge - They hang around until something bumps into them, then they go off. Duh!
14. Quantum - Like above, but more hurt.
15. Pine - More a missile platform, it fires missiles at the enemy as well as detonating on contact.

Are you a CONTROL FREAK?

As the Mitre 10 ad says, you gotta have the right tools for the job, and the right tools for this job are... well, you decide.

Mouse/Keyboard

This combo works reasonably well and will make an easy transition for Quakers. The only problem is that the mouse sensitivity cannot be bumped up as high as most Quakers like it, and you can't control all propulsion controls with one hand, so you have to make some sacrifices.

Keyboard

Die-hard Descenders swear by the keyboard as the only control mechanism for a true 3D game with complex commands like multiple weapon classes (projectile/energy, missile and mine/bomb) and powerups (nitro....). Forsaken lets you assign any control to any key + an alternate key if you so desire. It's not as fast or accurate as the mouse, but as most weapons are area-effect or fire-and-forget, it doesn't matter that much.

SpaceOrb

Ah, the ill-fated rubbery black orb of death. About the only thing the orb is good for is flying around in Descent and playing solo. Same goes for Forsaken. It's not bad for moving around, but get involved in a heated firefight where you have to juggle your arsenal and you can kiss your sorry ass goodbye.

Gamepad

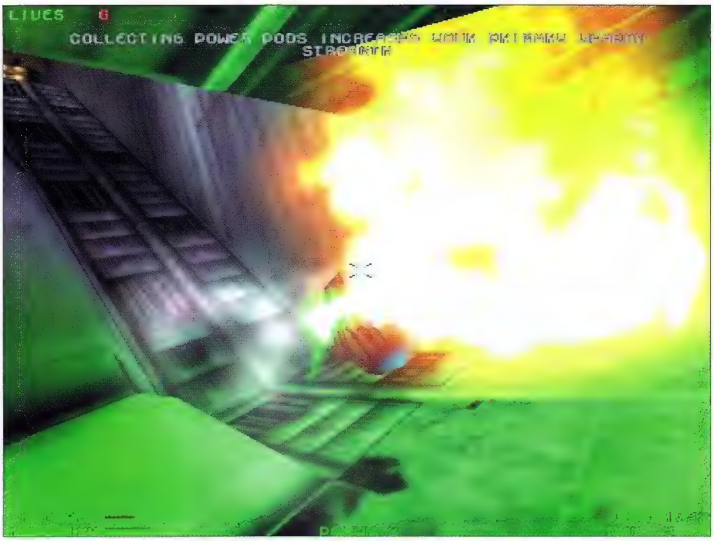
Would be cool if you could have an N-64 controller for the PC, but there isn't one and an ordinary gamepad just doesn't cut it.

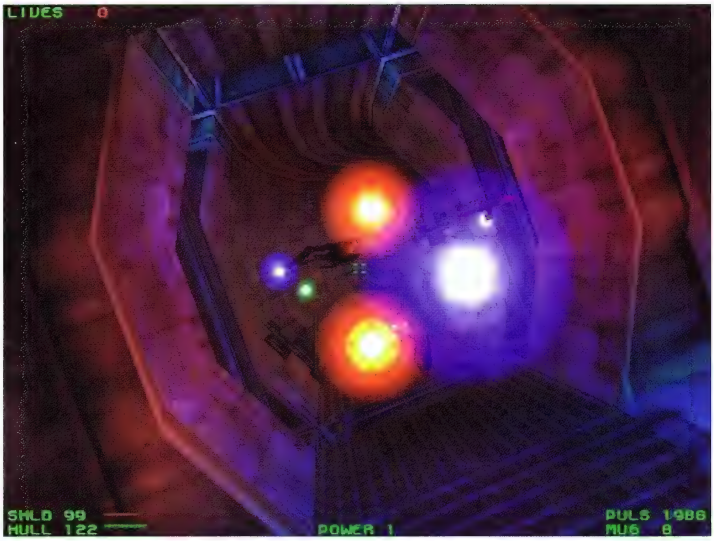
Joystick/Keyboard

A slightly better option than mouse/keyboard as you have the accuracy of an analogue device for movement coupled with many buttons for other functions.

HOTAS
(Hands On Throttle And Stick)

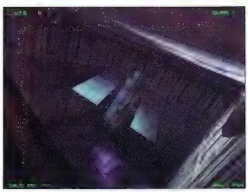
I found this to be the best option, and not just because I love flight sims. With a Joystick that has a hat switch, a separate throttle and also rudder pedals, you can control all axes of movement and rotation without lifting a finger. Add to that the zillion buttons found on Thrusty/CH products and you have yourself one deadly combination. The only drawback is that you have to buy all the gear.





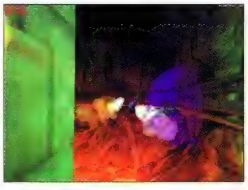
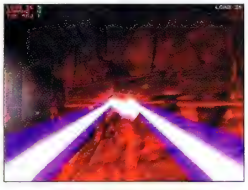
The pyrotechnics are spectacular- to the point where you can't see what's going on. Just keep shooting

shots are one frame/eternity. The frame rate never drops below 40 fps even in large rooms with plenty of action, but you have to play the game with a 3D card to squeeze this kind of performance out of this game. That said, you don't need a Ninja PC to run the game as long as you have a piece of 3D hardware, and Forsaken supports almost all of them. True, there are no huge areas like Quake2 or even some of the reactor cores in Descent2, but this is a game of navigating tight tunnels and hallways, with the occasional room rather than a space sim. Then there's the other side of game immersion: the sound. Forsaken



Blow up your buddies!

There are only 16 levels in the single player game, but they will take you many enjoyable days to complete. Let's not kid ourselves though, as we all know that is but practice for the real game - multiplayer! There are eleven multiplayer maps included, with each one having a different theme. Most are too big to play one-on-one as you're constantly on the move looking for the other guy, so I recommend at least four players on each map. There are also five multiplayer variants to keep it interesting, ranging from your regular deathmatch to capture the flag to Bounty Hunt/Team Bounty Hunt, where the object is to find the hidden gold on a level and then stay alive. The only drawback I found to multiplayer was the weapons - they're too powerful, which was the same reason I didn't enjoy multiplayer Descent as much as the single player game. Missiles are unfair in this type of close combat game as it's too easy to blast your opponent with a barrage of five Solaris's and watch him explode instead of wearing him down and playing cat-and-mouse.

Forsaken will take some multiplayer business from Quake, but lacks the overall finese of the big one

doesn't disappoint in this area either. Each weapon has a very distinct firing sound, each enemy has different sounds for movement, and your character talks to you a la Duke Nukem, although some voices can get a little annoying.

Don't think you're a nameless, faceless Mr/Mrs/Ms generica either. There are 16 bikers and bikes to choose from, each with different attributes like speed, shield strength, hair colour and underwear preference so you can choose a bike that best compliments your abilities and dress sense. For example, if you want to dash in, shoot around a bit and then get out, you'd get a fast and manoeuvrable bike. If you are a raw firepower kinda dude that's not worried about agility, grab a slow bike with heaps of ammo and missiles.

Built-in Bots

The most disappointing aspect of many a first-person game is the enemy AI. It sucks so bad that the first time you jump in a multiplayer game you get absolutely slaughtered simply because the other guy moved while you were lining up your shot. Forsaken teaches you the realities of life before you have to suffer public indignation by having enemies move like human players, ie, with a certain degree of unpredictability and a burning desire to get out of your line of fire. All while shooting at you with very big guns, of course. Watch them weave and dodge, circle strafe and generally make themselves a pain to kill.

There's more good stuff than I've included here, of course. The attention to detail is great and little things like heaps of save slots, totally configurable controls, easy demo recording and playback, video and sound options go a long way to please fussy gamers. The multiplayer game options are also extensive and the included game variants will keep this game on the hard drive for many moons to come. I could go on but then I'd be wasting valuable time when I could be playing. Now where'd I put the no-doz?

George Argy

93%

Category	Corridor Shooter
Players	1-16
Publisher	Acclaim
Price	$89.95
Rating	MA15+
Available	Now
For	What, are you friggin' blind? Looks special, plays well, sounds great - what more do you want?
Against	Not much wrong with the single player game. The multiplayer performance is a little disappointing and the weapons are too powerful.
Need	P133, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, Win95
Want	P166, 32MB, 16x CD-ROM, 3D accelerator, HOTAS controls

3D SUPPORT

All of them

STARCRAFT

From the makers of Diablo and Warcraft comes Starcraft. Isn't it nice when expectations are exceeded?!

"Starcraft is a disappointment, and I just don't like it ." Those were my words to fellow gamer buddies back when I first had the chance to take it for an initial test drive. It's not uncommon for first time Starcraft players to be overheard grumbling and feeling letdown. The long delays coupled with copious amounts of hype are going to be hard for any game, no matter how good the quality to live up to. Then there is the TA factor. Ever since the arrival of the Cavedog juggernaut, with it's realistic use of 3D terrain and whizz bango polygon graphics there's been concern over Starcraft's reliance on old fashioned (but very nice looking) 2D sprite based graphics. There's little doubt that the whole non-3D thing stops Starcraft from grabbing your balls like TA did on it's virgin run. While Warcraft 2 was many a gamers' fave, the horror scenario was Starcraft being a light sequel to it's forebear with only nominal updating. It's initially a nightmare come true when first playing the Terran side, as they are very similar to Warcraft 2 in functionality even down to their building upgrade path. All of these symptoms are just part of the "30 minute Starcraft syndrome." Play for more that half and hour and it's clear that Blizzard have produced an game that demolishes the current plague of crap RTS games and stands as a very bright light for all of us looking for the highly sought after gamer addiction factor.

Absorbing story, really!

Game storylines are quite often dodgy affairs, just thrown together to serve as some thinly veiled excuse to kill lots of onscreen baddies and hopefully have a good time in the process. Starcraft's plot is brilliant and makes for the best single player campaign yet seen in the world of RTS games. As Powerplay reviewers we understand that spoiling crucial elements of a story will lead to unpleasant spanking type events courtesy of Ben's dark side, so I'll tread carefully here. On the edge of the galaxy, lies a secluded sector of space colonized by descendants of Earth criminals that were long ago given the deep space heave-ho. They're a nasty bunch that are plagued by vicious civil wars. The Zerg are even nastier, a brutal mix of Star Treks's Borg, HR Geiger's Alien and

Just like Warcraft, a mix of classic unit types with a touch of magic = a winning formula

the contents of your handkerchief only insane. The Protoss are an ancient race fuelled by incredible technology and powerful psychic abilities. While the humans are busy backstabbing each other, they feel pledged to doing some ass-whooping on the Zerg. There are ten missions for each of the three races, and when played in order it's like being involved in a wonderfully written sci-fi epic. There are heroes to protect, intrigue to uncover and lots of surprises along the way.

I'm very guilty of often skipping single player campaigns in previous RTS titles and heading straight for multiplayer land. Starcraft's story had me totally absorbed, nicely done Blizzard.

3 games in 1

Unlike War2's Orcs and Humans which were essentially clones of each other, Starcraft's biggest point of hype surrounded the three sides being very different from each. That they are, with only the basics of production bearing similarities like Mineral Crystals and Vespene Gas being collected by the three sides' peons/drones. Remember how in War2 army size was pegged to the amount of farms you built? This time around each side has their equivalent of farms. For the Terrans it's Supply Posts, that are exactly like futuristic farms. The Zerg's farms are called Overlords and can float around the place doubling as scouts. The Protoss equivalent also provide an energy grid for the placement of buildings. Resource gathering and population farms are where the similarities between the trio of forces end. Each side has their own unique procedure of base building and unit production which means you must apply a different strategy for each case. The Zerg's path of building an army is certainly the most unconventional of the three. A central hatchery is built that automatically churns out larvae. Clicking on these, lets you mutate them into the various members of the Zerg swarm depending on

3 GAMES IN 1

Which is the Winning Race?

Terran

The Terrans big advantage is the ability of installations to detach from the ground and fly to another part of the map. Great if a strategic withdrawal becomes necessary or when a deposit of crystals runs dry. Just pack up and move to the next crystal rich area.

Marine -Power Armour, big machine guns and able to shoot both air and land targets. Good value.

Ghosts -Scouts with stealth technology purpose built for spying on enemy bases. Most rewarding when used for spotting targets for a nuclear missile attack.

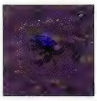
Arclite Seige Tank -Nice for rolling around the battlefield, but research Siege Mode and watch these guys clamp down to the ground for long range artillery fire. Fantastic for taking out enemy buildings, but just as useful for base for defensive.

Behomoth Battlecruiser -Slow but packs a punch when upgraded with the Yamato mini-nuke cannon.

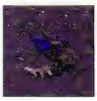
Explorer Science Vessel -A floating eye in the sky, but more importantly can be decked out with some interesting features, like the EMP Shockwave which will disable all enemy shields in a given area.

Zerg

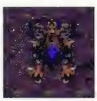
The Zerg are vile ugly critters, that are set to take over the universe. Looks like the Microsoft monopoly is over. Their units can also bury under the ground, setting up for ambushes and regenerating back to full health even when nearly dead. Here's an insight on how the Zerg tick.



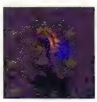
Zergling -Basic grunt fighter, but the Zerg player can churn these out at an alarming rate. Seeing 30 Zerglings racing into a base, is one of Starcraft's greatest sights.



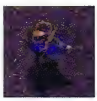
Hydralisk -Shoots needle spines at both land and air targets. When upgraded with heavier organic armour, they are a force to contend with.



Ultralisk -The meanest of the Zerg land forces. Can take on a tank for lunch, and what it does to enemy infantry ain't pretty.



Mutalisk -Another Zerg creature with "lisk" at the end. This one is a flying attack creature though, but can be mutated into the stronger but slower Guardian.



Queen -Lightly armoured, but missy here has a special bag of tricks. She can infest Terran soldiers and transform them into suicidal bombers and ensnare enemy troops in "slow down" snot.

Protoss

If there wasn't a war on, the Protoss would probably be out meditating on the meaning of existence and eating lentils. They are far from wimps though, and have advanced shield technology which can be recharged over time. Here's a few pieces of their powerful arsenal.

Zealot -Basic attack unit, but armed with deadly blades charged with psionic energy they are the strongest "grunts" on the playing field.

Dragoon -Four legged robotic exo-skeletons that shoot a strong phase disruptor. Below average armour, so use Zealots for escort purposes always.

High Templar -Very powerful. Sends out Psionic storms that wreak havoc on living organisms in any chosen area. If you must have the best, sacrifice two of these guys and get an Archon. They glow in the dark, and attack with one hell of a shockwave.

Carrier -Awesome. Huge airship which can build and launch it's own waves of fighters. Even the mighty Terran Battlecruiser should run from this.

what bio-technology upgrade facilities you have built. The Zerg are restricted to building on "The Creep" a purple living carpet that is the organic link between all of the Zerg organic facilities. The essence of the Zerg is the ability to reproduce very quickly, at the expense of individual unit strength. The Zerg player must not sit back and let the enemy build up a sizable army, but has to pester and continually attack using higher numbers to advantage. The Protoss are opposite to the Zerg as their units are individually powerful, but expensive. The Protoss warp all their units and buildings from their home planet of Aiur but base defense can be a bit of a problem. Their buildings rely upon an energy grid courtesy of pylons (farms). If the Protoss player poorly places these pylons, he's in a precarious situation where the destruction of one pylon can mean a whole area of defensive cannons and buildings go out to lunch. With care, and a thought to keeping the battle away from home-base a Protoss player can deliver real

Big 'n' hefty 'n' slooww units are fun but require a huge investment, so, stick to grunts and light units...

Map trickery makes for careful combined arms tactics. Damn we love this game!

trouble. The Terrans have no base restrictions as in the Zerg Creep or the Protoss Pylons, but must be careful in the early days of battle as their base units aren't cheap like the Zerg, but really need to have armour and firepower upgraded to be truly effective. In the late game they enter a devastating phase with nukes and stealth technology.

Multiperfect

Starcraft is not a revolution in RTS games. The graphics while being beautiful examples of how to make 2D artwork look stunning, are not using state of the art rendering technology. The terrain is based on a simple one step high ground vs low ground system, with units on the high ground getting a firing advantage over lower placed units. The controls are the same as War2 except with some basic waypointing added in. Even the annoying feature of being able to select only a limited number of units (twelve) at a given moment is back. If there's one heavy criticism of Starcraft it is in this interface area. After playing TA and DR it's hard going back to a system where you must scroll to your buildings to build things instead of having a permanent building toolbar. These downers aside, I can't stop playing the damn thing. Totally hooked. Once past the excellent campaign a quick battle/skirmish mode awaits with wicked AI that knows how to use units effectively, and not just sit there going through the motions. Multiplayer on Battle.net is the place to be at the moment, with an inbuilt ranking system and automatic map transfer between players. There's different multiplayer modes to try out such as Greed (person with most resources wins) and Capture the Flag but everybody seems to like the conventional army vs army last base standing format. Starcraft seems lag resistant as I even managed to play a co-op game against the computer with a guy in Finland with little trouble from the lag monster. This on a 28.8 modem and at 2am...THE time for Internet gaming.

TA is still the game for huge unit variety, increasingly new units courtesy of the Net and a more accurately represented battlefield but Starcraft has more personality, a much better single player experience and is just a hoot to play. A winner by any measure of the word.

Pete Sharpe

92%

Category	Real time strategy
Players	1-8
Publisher	Blizzard
Price	$89.95
Rating	MA15+
Available	Now
For	Excellent editor, which allows for the making of everything from new maps to multiplayer campaigns. Original CD can spawn and host up to eight multiplayer copies.
Against	Too much screen real estate taken up with the command toolbar.
Need	P90, 16Mb RAM, WIN95
Want	P100, 32Mb RAM.

DIE BY THE SWORD

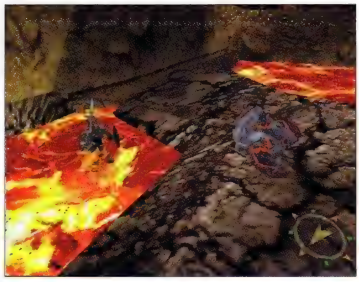
Don't turn the page yet reader, for this is far more than just another 3D action game...

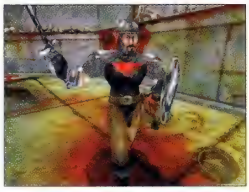
"I'll bite your legs off!" Dismemberment dreams come true for Python fans

They said it couldn't be done. No way, never happen. Yeah right that'll be the day. Not in my life time buddy. The Sword fighting game has just been in the too hard basket since the dawn of gaming. Sure, there's been the Samurai Showdown type things, Japanese fighting games ala Streetfighter or Tekken style with swords tacked on. They were fun little games, but nothing has captured the spirit or raw bloodiness of a sword being swung through the air and imploding a skull or mutilating some warm flesh at the other end. No cartoon sprites or strange "Harkee Kazoo!" combo screams. I'm talking Highlander decapitations and Monty Python's infamous Holy Grail limbless fighting scene. Die By The Sword is for the frustrated Viking beserker or medieval madman in us all.

Virtual sword

There's some pretty impressive heritage behind this game. A Dr Peter Akemann spent a couple of years locked away in some dark secretive lab in an obsessive search to lock down the mechanics of human movement, and then adapting them to the ultimate sword fighting game. He's probably a very freaky fellow who lured athletes into his laboratory, hooking sensors up to them and proceeding to yell "Walk straight, damn you....walk straight!" Whatever his method, the end results make for the most innovative control system of a human body yet seen in gaming. The good doctor's new VSIM (Virtual Movement) system allows for full control over your fighting moves, with the joystick, mouse or keyboard dynamically mapped to your sword play. Wherever you move the control your sword arm follows that path, relative to both your speed and direction of movement. To demonstrate here's a run through of a downward slash using the joystick (which is the control of choice). Moving the joystick to the upper left raises the sword over your left shoulder, then pushing the joystick to the lower right, sees the sword swing down in a slashing motion towards the ground. Same procedure for upward strikes or even jumping forward while smashing your blade down upon the enemy.





Going "down the shops" with 200 odd kilos of steel strapped to your body

It gets better when you start combining your moves into fluid forward downward and upward strikes, followed by a step back blocking manoeuvre.

The easy way is the wrong way

The VSIM style of combat is tough to get the hang of, and your early days will see the sword pointing everywhere but at the monster about to slay you. Don't be disheartened, for learning the art of the western blade is a rewarding experience. After two weeks of heavy play, I'm still not fully versed in all the intricacies. Basic strikes are ok, but I'm still getting acquainted with positioning the body to deliver a fully forced blow, as twisting your body in the same direction of the swordswing is paramount to delivering more damage. There is a wimpy option of setting the controls back to a standard Tekken/Streetfighter mode minus VSIM, but it's like a one way trip back to the Dark Ages.

Incredibly enjoyable

Die By The Sword is two distinct games. One being the arena, your classic enclosed battle mode perfect for straight duelling. You'll spend a lot of time here practicing and just letting off stress. The other is a Tomb Raider type adventure game. Confession time. I never got into the whole Tombraider

PLUS+

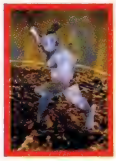
MONSTERS

Some of the delights to cut down in their prime.

Kobolds -On their own snivelling little critters begging to be dispatched to the next world. In packs though, be careful of the swarm and surround tactic. Keep ya back to the wall, and show 'em the strength of steel.

Orcs -Half pig, half man. Where's Kramer when you need him? They typically run straight at you, axes primed for a downward strike. Sidestep and then strike the leg from behind for a juicy pork chop.

Ogres -Run away! Well if you can't do that, keep your distance at all times going for the cheap hit. If you get cornered, say your prayers.



Mantis -Insects that aren't as bad as they look. Their strength is their speed, well until you take off one of those spindly legs that is

Dwarf -Ahh but for the days of the friendly dwarves in Tolkien's books. These guys are insane, but are very strong and resilient to attack. Difficult to get an arm or a leg off, just have to wear them down.

Skeletons -Geez where's the holy water when you need it? These anorexic fellows take a lot of pounding and still keep ticking. Go for the legs, that's the first things to fall off usually.

Whoa big fella! It was only a pork joke! There's no arm in it! Die by the Sword has a twisted sense of humour, but that's a good thing

scene. Great atmosphere, mammary glands, graphics etc but the puzzles just got too bloody frustrating. Our hero Enric's quest is much more slanted towards combat than puzzles, although there's a few brainbenders about the place, just nothing too horrible. That's not to say it's an easy trip. Many times you're outnumbered and a walking band-aid commercial with only the feint sniff of a healing potion up ahead to keep you going. It would have been very easy for the designers to have simply strung some atypical dungeon rooms together populated with beasties, making for a simple hack-n-slash. Instead there is literally a surprise around every corner. Laugh at poor Enric as he fends hungry orcs off, while swinging upside down foot caught in a rope trap. Save a kobold from his nasty big brothers, and make a friend. Impersonate a shaman orc-chieftain and take a tour of the dungeon in style. It's a magical mystery tour from go to woe, incredibly enjoyable. Pity it's a bit too short. You won't complete it in a day, but the quest of Enric's lost girlfriend won't last beyond a few days for the avid gamer. Arena mode is a longer term prospect as there's really no foreseeable limit to how skilled and fanciful you can get with the blade. Enter the arena tournament and fight your way through increasingly stacked odds, stepping into the shoes of either Enric or tasting the dark side and fighting as one of the enemy monsters.

Need meaty PC

If you haven't got a powerhouse 3D card, then it's a tough call recommending Die By The Sword. Playing it on both a non-accelerated P133 and P166 was underwhelming. High res was horribly jerky and low res just looked blocky which dramatically affects the quest in particular. Instead of looking up ahead and spying what monsters are about to be faced, your only clue is a blurred mess of pixels. Multiplayer, well that's a bit of a sad story as well. No co-op play for the adventure, only death-matching in the arena is available but not for two players on one machine sadly. Even though TCP/IP is supported, the readme file is quite clear that Internet play is just too slow to play effectively, unless you own a cable modem that is. Internet play would be a dream come true for this game, maybe we can hope for some sort of miracle super patch. Multiplayer quibbles aside, Die By The Sword is a thrill to play and a complete no-brainer purchase for fighting/action/adventure fans. Sort of covers us all I'd say.

Pete Sharpe

92%

Category	Action/Adventure
Players	1-2
Publisher	Interplay
Price	TBA
Rating	MA15+
Available	Now

For Excellent interactive tutorial. Included move editor lets you create custom attacks, yummo. Graphics engine allows damage effects, as in open gashes and limbs being hacked off.

Against Adventure element on the short side. Forced to use healing potions as you pick them up, very restricting. Somersaults in chain mail and fighting with one leg doesn't suit, considering the control system is otherwise so accurate to physics.

Need P100, 16Mb RAM, WIN95.

Want P166, 32Mb RAM, 3DFX card.

3D SUPPORT

- 3DFX Voodoo Glide
- Rendition native support
- Direct 3D support for Nvidia Riva 128, Matrox Millenium 2,
- Matrox Mystique only.

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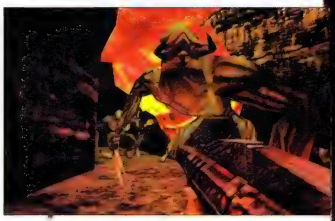
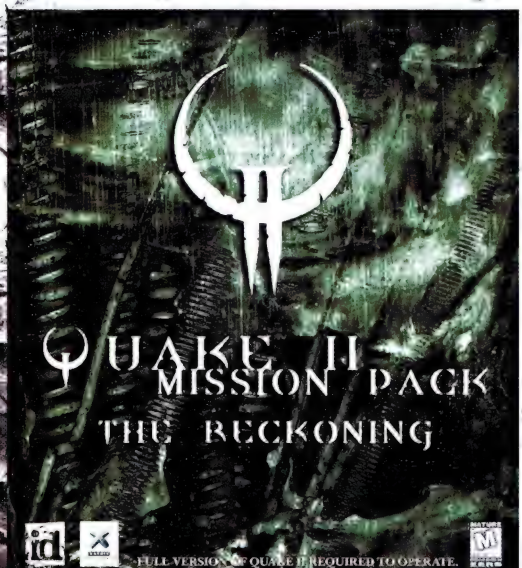
virtually undetectable, *gekks* are lightning-fast creatures that will hunt you down, leaping from the shadows to claw or bite. even their acidic blood is deadly.

the *trap* sucks nearby enemies inside and turns them into food cubes for player consumption.



YOU WON'T BE SEEING THEM FOR A WHILE.



AN OFFICIAL, id AUTHORIZED QUAKE II MISSION PACK.™

available june 1998

Developed by Xatrix entertainment

Published by id www.idsoftware.com

Distributed by ACTIVISION. www.activision.com

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JANE'S F-15

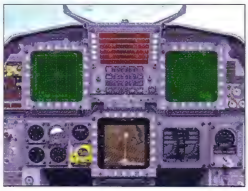
Comfortably the premier jet combat sim, thanks to the impeccable credentials of Andy Hollis and Jane's.

"Passed the Initial Point!" cries the Weapons System Officer (WSO) from the backseat. Look at the HUD, 16 miles to target 500 knots, with the Terrain Following Radar (TRF) set at 300 feet. "Tiger Flight going in hot" you hear over the radio. Good, in go the air defence suppression boys. 12 miles to target. Switch to the Flight radio channel, and direct your Flight to "Radar on, engage primary targets", "Two", "Three", "Four" you hear as the Flight acknowledges. Each F15 has his own target on the Iraqi Chemical Factory. 8 miles to go. TFR off. Light the afterburners and push up to 1500 feet, invert. South West building's mine. Pickle the target, "Two's in hot", "Three's in hot", "Four's in hot" yell the other pilots. Release, "Bombs away" cries your WSO, "Target destroyed". Instruct the Flight to rejoin formation, all radars off, confirm from AWACS the egress route is clear of enemy fighters. Then switch to Tanker channel and call for fuel before landing. Another successful mission in Jane's F-15 flight simulation! Sound like a sales pitch? It's not. On a well planned and executed mission, that's the way it happens.

It's an Andy game

F-15 has been designed by Andy Hollis, who gave us F15 Strike Eagle III in 1992, and more recently the Jane's Longbow games. I think this game will please beginners and hard core simmers alike, but nonetheless, the game also comes in for some strong criticism where it deserves it.

F-15 comes with two Player's Guides, one for Casual Play and the other for Expert Play. Casual Play has a simple flight model and "arcade like" Multi-Purpose Displays (MPDs). There are some screen shots in the review that show the difference, for instance the Tactical Electronic Warning System in Casual Play shows nice little images of enemy SAMs and aircraft. One click and you've designated the target etc. It's a real winner for beginners. It allows you to understand the game and aircraft, before going to Expert Play. You can still get killed etc, but to be honest it's just plain fun and nice to go back to sometimes.



(above) Sexy cockpit shot (below) The mission briefing screen. Missions are also available via download from Jane's

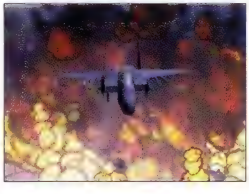
First: The bad news

Six options are available at the main menu, training, single missions, campaigns, instant action, multiplayer and a Jane's Reference Library. Training offers 16 missions that get you going with assistance from the Expert Manual. I was disappointed with this aspect. F-15 in Expert Play is more complex than AH 64D Longbow, and it really could have done with an interactive tutorial of the standard that ships with Longbow. I was also disappointed with the Reference section; it was not up to the normal Jane's standard.

The Multiplayer option is my greatest disappointment. The capability for two people to play frontseat/backseat is gone! That was the absolute best part of Strike Eagle III. You and a friend could work as a team, and the satisfaction from doing so was insurmountable, just as it is in Longbow.

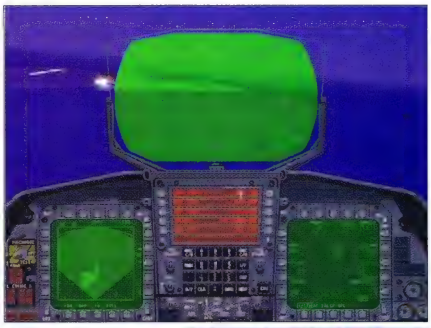
Blast turbulence

The 3Dfx graphics engine places you in the Persian Gulf region with Campaigns in Iraq and Iran. Snow topped mountains, valleys, canyons, sand dunes and cities are well modelled at all heights, and the feeling of movement brings the game to life at low altitude, specially with the Terrain Following Radar set at 300 feet! Ye Ha!



Main and secondary explosions are fantastic whether in the air or on the ground, and you can feel the blast turbulence hit the aircraft at times.

Sadly there is no vegetation on the ground, and just like Longbow this is a real let down. NovaLogic have it over Jane's in this department. I'm also sick to



(left) The allocate targets setup screen. Used during mission planning
(above) An air to ground attack on Khark Island
(right) The weapons inventory

death of Iraq/Iran as a campaign area, let's get back to 1998 and beyond, and look at UN peacekeeping or similar operations. Globalisation of the world economy is causing tensions everywhere, so there's plenty of other options.

Authentic avionics

Once in the cockpit, it looks like the real thing. Jane's have modelled the avionics of the real F-15 so well, that there is little to tell them apart. Three MPDs in the front and four in the backseat, all of which can be controlled by a mouse and/or keyboard commands. Each MPD can perform scores of operations and the learning curve for Expert Play is enormous but enjoyable. There are too many options to mention, but the ability to fly high, use the Synthetic Aperture Radar to map a target area, then go low and use the terrain Following Radar to mask your approach while you designate targets on the MPD is awesome.

So too is the ability to communicate direct with AWACS and Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) aircraft who steer you away from trouble and assist ingress without having to turn your radar on. Control of wingmen and communication with tanker aircraft is achieved through an efficient menu system with voice acknowledgment and advice generated from the artificial intelligence inherent in the pilot of each aircraft.

Download missions

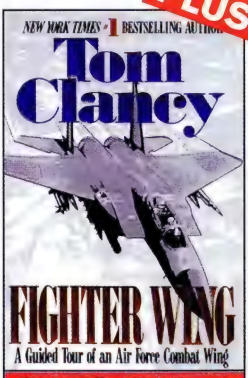
The Campaigns in Iraq and Iran are dynamically generated and allow you to pick and choose pilots and develop and rest your pilots as you see fit. Campaign briefings are enough to get you there, but don't really fill you in like Longbow or M1 Tank Platoon 2's Briefings. The Mission Builder is a real strength in the game. It allows you to set up any type of object anywhere in the Persian Gulf, give it knowledge, a task, a side (sometimes neutral) then generate the mission. You can save missions and swap them with mates. Jane's even has a mission download page on their web site.

The only other piece of criticism to offer is the flight model. I don't think the aircraft showed the grunt of two 29,000 pound thrust Pratt & Witney Turbofan engines. Many others think the same, so I'd say we'll see a patch to improve this. I also think that we'll see a mission disk rather soon, because two theatres are not sufficient and Jane's are a copping heaps of flak on this issue.

Aimed at the casual gamer and the hard core simmer, F-15 is value for money and will more than likely be developed further.

Maj. Ian Lindgren

PLUS+



Check out Tom Clancy's Fighter Wing, an insider's look at a US Air Force Fighter Wing; the planes, the technology, and the people. Clancy describes the thrill of takeoff, the drama of the dogfight, and the relentless dangers fighter pilots face every day of their lives. It includes a detailed analysis of the F-15 Eagle, photographs, illustrations, diagrams, combat strategies and training techniques.

85%

Category	Flight Simulation
Players	1 to 8 by LAN. 2 Players by Null Modem, Modem and Internet
Publisher	Jane's Combat Simulations
Price	$89.95
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	Real appeal for beginners and hard core fanatics; very technically accurate in cockpit and avionics. Dynamic mission generation and a superb mission builder. The most fantastic explosive effects seen in 3Dfx.
Against	Fairly dull training, a limited number of combat theatres, no frontseat/backseat multiplayer capability.
Need	P166, 32 MB RAM and 3Dfx card.
Want	P200 +, 32 MB RAM and 3Dfx card.

3D SUPPORT

- 3DFX Glide

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THE LONG AWAITED PC STRATEGY EPIC

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SONY'S NEW MEDIEVAL 3D FIGHTER REVIEWED

AND MUCH MORE!

COMPLETE RESIDENT EVIL 2 WALKTHROUGH

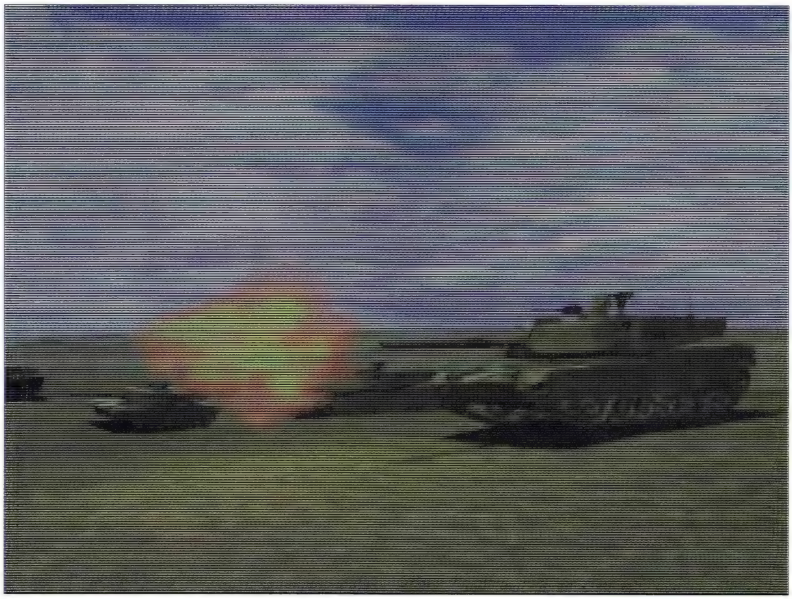
SONY analogue dual shock controller and new improved N64 GAMEPADS reviewed
This month's feature: FORSAKEN. meet the teams behind forsaken.
Find out how the PC version shapes up!

12 PAGES OF CHEATS & PLAYGUIDES

ON SALE MAY 13TH

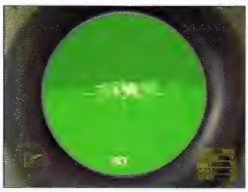
M1 TANK PLATOON 2

Other developers have left tank sims alone, figuring MicroProse would dominate with this title. Well, will they?



Two applications are loaded when you install this game, Tank Platoon 2 (TP2) and War College. War College is an exceptionally good summary of the US FM100 series of pamphlets which includes US Army operations, Marine Corps Warfighting Manual, OPFOR (Opposing Force) Doctrine, OPFOR recognition guides and detailed briefings on the theatres of operation within the game.

Gameplay centres on 100 x 100 km area that is ample for manoeuvre warfare, and you command a platoon of M1A2s in Army Armoured Regiments, Army Calvary Regiments or USMC Tank Battalions. Single missions and five campaigns are set in the Gulf War II, North Africa, Far East, Moldavia, and World War III. Single missions are either randomly generated or you can choose a number of premade battles, some based on actual Gulf War engagements and others based on the NATO Warsaw pact conflict concept.



(above) cockpit shot (below) The mission briefing screen. Missions are also available via download from Jane's

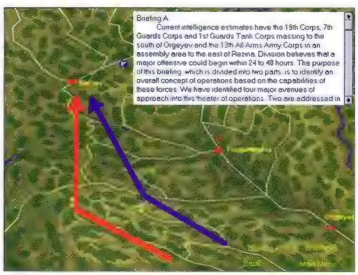
Russian tanks

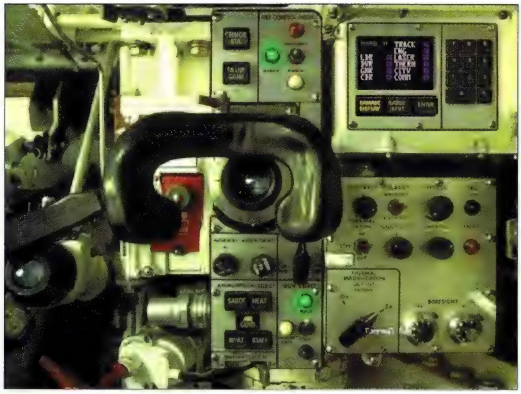
My passion in the game is its Multiplayer capability. Five players can play via LAN or Internet with one acting as the Opposing Force (OPFOR) commander and the others manning one tank each in an M1A2 platoon. Cunning stuff indeed. As OPFOR Commander you have soviet equipment and direct the deployment of land and air forces from the Map Screen. You have masses of technologically inferior forces to pit against the technologically superior American's; and let me tell you, the US forces don't always win!

In the game proper, you act as a "free spirit" guiding your tank platoon using a point and click interface. Briefings are very comprehensive including an Intelligence Brief, Friendly and Enemy Forces in the area, Phase Lines and Boundaries, a detailed mission and tasks that you must complete to be successful. My gripe is that again Phase Lines and Boundaries are poorly implemented. If you list Phase Lines and Boundaries in Briefings, then you've got to mark them on the IVIS map or it's pointless.

Switch cockpits

If the tank you are in dies, you just slip to the next and carry on. You have complete control over all forces under your command, and at times you can call on CAS in the form of A10s, Harriers, OH-58D Kiowa, Longbow and Cobra Gunships. You also have conventional artillery and MLRS at call, but make sure you place it where the enemy will be when it falls! CAS and artillery come complete with radio comms, "I'm coming in hot!" you hear as the A10 streaks overhead and destroys a threat.





Absolutely fascinating to watch! Tank rounds are well simulated with APFSDS flying fast and with a low trajectory, and MPAT rounds detonating above enemy vehicles and ramming the warhead through its roof.

The Tank Commander Cockpit is a tank's centre of operations. Here you monitor the state of the battle using the IVIS computer and Map Screen to remain aware of every aspect of the battle while allowing the other crew members to do their job. The IVIS allows you to task each element, set waypoints and if they get in trouble tell them to withdraw, send CAS to support them, or bypass the enemy for your main force to mop up. On capture the objective missions you blast you way in using every form of deception, bring up the carriers unload the infantry to clear the objective, then exploit to repel counter attacks, and keep some arty up your sleeve just in case. It's well done. The CITV does have a problem, it's very difficult to tell where you are looking in relation to the gun because the CITV indicator is very small and I'm not sure that the gunner always responds to target designations. With the hatch open the manual says you have binoculars and NVG, but you don't! and you really need them.

(above) this is the heart of the game - the Tropp Commanders position - and lets you switch to the main map for total control (above right) the Gunners position

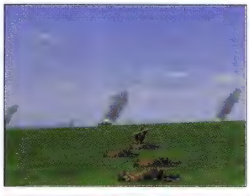
PLUS+

PANZER LEADER

General Heinz Guderian

Foreword by B.H. Liddell Hart
New Introduction by Kenneth Macksey

"Panzer Leader," written by former Colonel-General of the Wehrmacht, Heinz Guderian, is a fascinating book. It describes Guderian's efforts to create and operate effective all-arms formations including armour, armoured infantry and towed (later self-propelled) artillery in spite of the opposition from the more traditional elements of the Wehrmacht. A great insight into the history of manoeuvre warfare.



The War College files are representative of the knowledge base that comes with this game

Frighteningly realistic

Atmosphere inside the hull is great, "Load MPAT", "MPAT up!" "Away! You will hear your platoon fire outside the hull, enemy and friendly CAS move from left to right, and if you let enemy infantry within mobile antitank weapon range, just watching those AT missiles come towards you is frightening. They fire, wobble and when the operator gains control they come straight at you.

All the bugs I've mentioned, and those such as AI that allows vehicles to bump into one another are being fixed now by Microprose now. They don't detract from gameplay markedly and in my opinion this is the best M1A2 game on the shelves. Buy this game now, train yourself, get the patch and this will be on the hard drive for months.

Maj. Ian Lindgren

91%

Category	Main Battle Tank Simulation
Players	1 to 5 by LAN. Modem and Internet play is possible
Publisher	Microprose.
Price	$89.95
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	A tactical game with more depth than anything we have seen in an armour simulation. The integration of armour with mounted infantry troops, fire support and CAS adds another dimension to gaming.
Against	There are some installation and graphics bugs, crew control and discipline needs to be improved, and so too does the CITV.
Need	P133, 32 MB RAM, 3Dfx card and Joystick.
Want	P200, 32 MB RAM, 3 Dfx card and Joystick, but will run comfortably without 3Dfx.

3D SUPPORT

• 3DFX Glide
D3D in the patch

WARHAMMER: Dark Omen

Developers are discovering the gameplay possibilities within a fast 3D world.

Back in the days when a lot of us were still 486 owners and getting mighty suspicious of these new fangled Pentium thingies, a new game called Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat appeared. Based on Games Workshops' Warhammer universe and boasting a 3D'ish battlefield map it looked like a good reason to lighten many a gamer's wallet. After a few days of playing, my copy made a one way trip to the back of the cupboard with all the other "I'll play it again when I'm in the mood one day" type games. Shadow of the Horned Rat's bodgey blobby men graphics ran like a tranquilised turtle on most machines and featured a horrible control interface that only Madam Lash's leather and handcuff brigade could enjoy. To hell with bad memories, time to look towards the light. A truly quality sequel has arrived in the form of Dark Omen.

Like Myth, but different... Dark Omen is more than a 3D combat zone. There's a lot more emphasis on Army management for starters

Reload that save

Morgan Bernhardt, captain of the Grudgebringer mercenary army is back from battling the Skaven ratmen last time around. Vampire Lords are mustering armies of zombies, skeletons and all the other dead folk that are sick of lying around in coffins all day and night being wormfood. Bernhardt's hard-ass army has their work cut out for them as orcs, goblins and other assorted things out of a D&D monster manual are also on the prowl. Dark Omen uses the same linked mission campaign structure as it's predecessor. Instead of the conventional receiving of fresh troops before each mission, you must manage and carry over surviving troops from battle to battle. In between missions you can buy fresh troops to replace casualties in your different brigades, hopefully bringing them back up to full strength for the next battle. Problem being that the happy folk of Warhammer world are either dirt poor or a bunch of tight wads, either way you usually don't end up with enough gold to keep your armies at full strength. Have an entire brigade massacred or lose an important individual and they are gone forever. Time to replay the mission. It adds a realistic edge to your campaign, but be prepared for an uphill campaign where backtracking to a savepoint three missions ago becomes necessary because your army with present resources can't carry the battle further.

Hyperactivity

While the ongoing campaign system might be similar to Shadow of the Horned Rat, Dark Omen uses a much simplified control system. You simply click

on a regiment's banner to select them, and click on the battlefield to send them on their way. Clicking on an enemy moves troops in for the kill. A non-obtrusive compact onscreen menu allows for charging, withdrawal and spell commands on the fly. You can easily give orders to offscreen regiments as their banners are displayed and clickable on the edge of the screen showing their position relative to your viewpoint. One problem is the lack of a speed control. Sure, real world commanders don't have the luxury of slowing down the pace of time but this is a game and when things are getting busy and your artillery starts inflicting friendly fire on your infantry because they engaged the artillery's enemy target, while at the same time three divisions of ghouls from different directions descend on your steam tank..well it gets hectic. There is some relief in the pause button that brings up an overall battle map, but you can't give orders in this mode so it's only a half way there feature. Even so, Dark Omen's controls are intuitive and a lot better than Horned Rat's interface.

P133-friendly

Decked out with a 3D accelerator card and the graphics are superb. Rotate and zoom in/out on a battlefield with gorgeous terrain features, menacing gothic buildings and the best water effects ever seen. All this beauty has a purpose, as the terrain plays the expected effects on your units. Archers are more accurate from above, LOS is blocked between buildings and clumps of trees can hide units from enemy eyes. The good looks extend to special effects like fireball spells, and cannon explosions. While not the best pyrotechnics effects seen, a fireball hurtling across the battlefield, striking enemy units and seeing the bodies fly accompanied with screams is a double thumbs up. Expectedly all this runs brilliantly smooth on a P166 3Dfx machine, but don't shed a tear if your machine is more humble. I tested the game on a P133 minus any 3D card, and while it didn't look as stunning, things were still on the pretty side and the game ran fine.

It's hard not to directly compare Dark Omen with Myth. Both are real time tactical battle games, and use a rich fantasy setting. Dark Omen has a larger variety of units (artillery, archers, pistols, calvary the list goes on) where as Myth is more limited. Magic is stronger and plays much more of a part in Dark Omen, but Myth gives more control over formations and individual unit movements. Then there is Multiplay. Dark Omen supports it, but lacks an Internet player matching service like Myth's Bungee.net. Myth gets a nod for offering more multi-player game modes and features, but Dark Omen offers a better single player experience due to the strategy in maintaining an army throughout an entire campaign. Warhammer's latest venture is excellent but very challenging.

Pete Sharpe

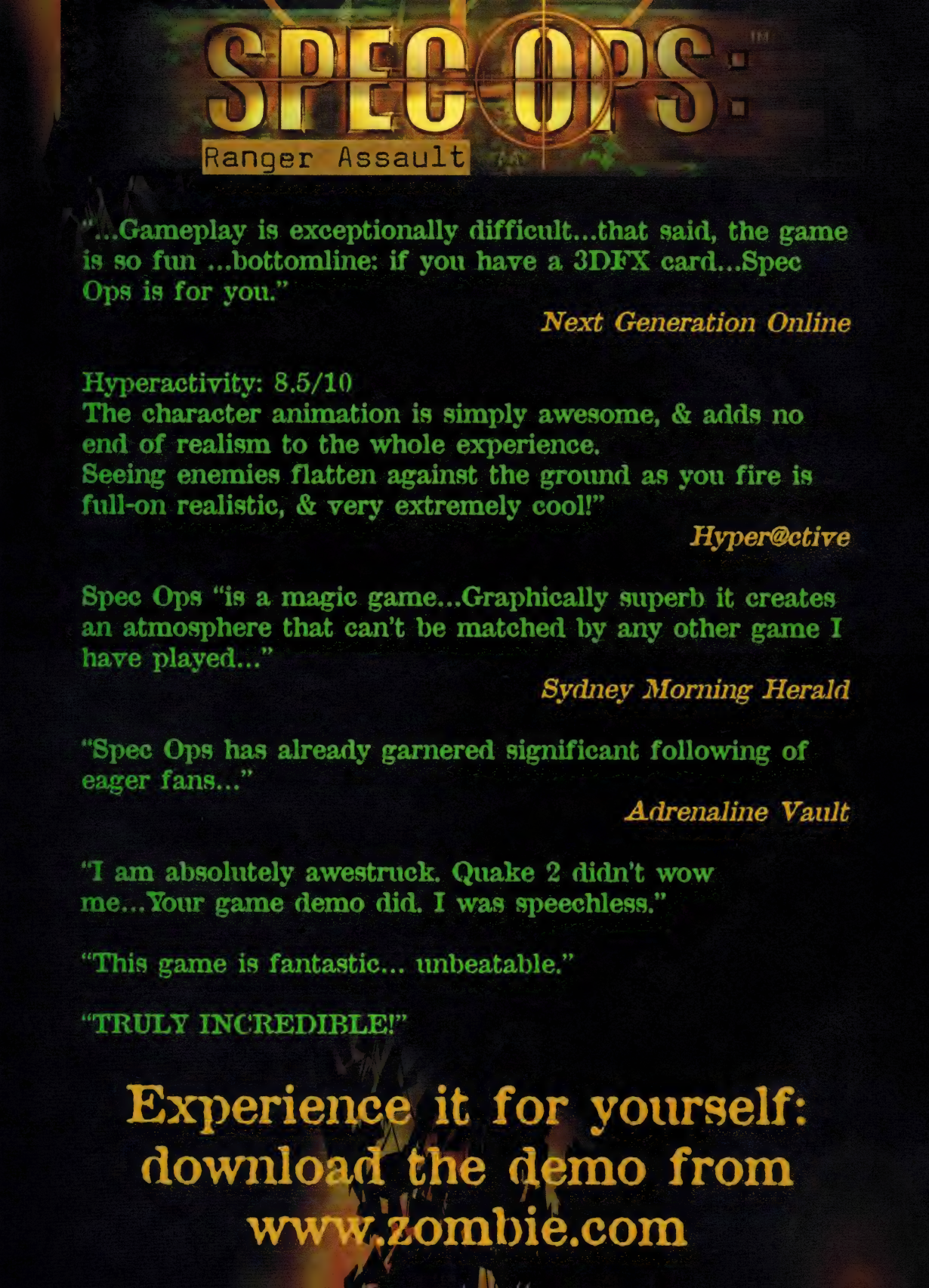
It's not all strategy. Power-ups, many magic, are plentiful. The fireball spells are quite spectacular...

88%

Category	Real time tactics
Players	1-2
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Price	TBA
Rating	$TBA
Available	Now
For	Every mission offers surprises from new units to magic items collected on the battlefield.
Against	Pathfinding sometimes goes a bit haywire with units not taking a direct line to where you want them to go. Very curious absence of skirmish mode, considering multi-player opponents are not easily found.
Need	P120, 32Mb RAM, WIN95.
Want	P166, 3D card.

3D SUPPORT

Direct 3D



"...Gameplay is exceptionally difficult...that said, the game is so fun ...bottomline: if you have a 3DFX card...Spec Ops is for you."

Next Generation Online

Hyperactivity: 8.5/10
The character animation is simply awesome, & adds no end of realism to the whole experience.
Seeing enemies flatten against the ground as you fire is full-on realistic, & very extremely cool!"

Hyper@ctive

Spec Ops "is a magic game...Graphically superb it creates an atmosphere that can't be matched by any other game I have played..."

Sydney Morning Herald

"Spec Ops has already garnered significant following of eager fans..."

Adrenaline Vault

"I am absolutely awestruck. Quake 2 didn't wow me...Your game demo did. I was speechless."

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ARMOR COMMAND

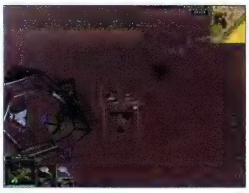
The "Action/Strategy" genre has always been a bit of a dud. Until now.

I hear you dear reader. You're saying the same thing I said when I picked up the box, "Action/Strategy? Christ, like if that hasn't proven to be a failed genre!" Well it's time to rethink that opinion because Armor Command may convert many of you. Admittedly, the similarities to Total Annihilation are many and it is tempting to write a review based on a comparison of the two games. But Armor Command is not just TA + funky camera views. In many respects it is a different game altogether, despite the fact that the intro is almost the same as the TA cimematics.

There are two sides to choose from as usual - the Terrans which is the by now familiar 'cyber' term for humans, and the Vrass, an alien race who do not want to be our buddies. I won't go into why there is a conflict but it's the usual quest for the total, er annihilation of your enemy.

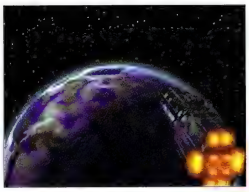
Sensible interface

The interface is something new and interesting, even if it's a little difficult to get used to at first. Once you play for a while it makes sense as everything you can do to with unit is presented to you when you move the mouse over it. Basically, you have one unit or group of units selected at all times. Moving the mouse changes the camera view to pan 360 around the unit in 3D mode, or around the map in overhead mode. Left click to move, right click to attack, plus holding down shift or control gives you some more options. It all works pretty damn well. The camera views and various maps in the game represent almost total flexibility. You get 2 3D views (one low and one high), 2 overhead views (again, low and high), an onscreen radar map and a playable tactical map. All views allow you to select, group move and attack units and are basically different methods of displaying the same information. Now that's freedom!



Strategy Gaming - be in it! Being "on the spot" adds major addrenalin to the gameplay

Visually it's a beautiful game. The units are all well constructed and move like real objects with



recoil and all. The camera moves smoothly from the 3D views to the overhead view and the explosions are tops, with objects being blown to bits a la a certain other game beginning with T. The terrain is fantastic with real mountains, cliffs, oceans and other stuff that makes the maps look more like flight sim maps rather than the token bump and hole.

Two tank types

It's no TA in terms of the number of units, but the variety of units

Aliens inbound, Earth doomed, you're our only hope. Beautiful princess too

on offer is enough to keep you going for a while. There's no real mention of additional units so it will be interesting to see if they provide more units on the website later on down the track. Your offensive units are your standard fare of like your ground units: 2 tank flavours (light, and heavy), scouts, fixed guns and missile towers; and air units: heli's, bombers, air carriers. There are maps with heaps of water, but for some strange reason there are no seaborne vessels. Then you've got your mining vehicles, radars and jammers, and assorted upgrade and mining buildings. The units for both sides are basically the same, although the Vrass have a couple of extra units to balance out the fact that they are slightly less powerful. As you upgrade tech levels by collecting more resources, the more powerful units become available to you, and you can also upgrade individual units by increasing their weapon power or making them self-repairing, depending on the type of unit.

It's a first!

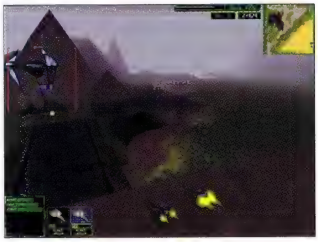
You could argue that Armor Command is the first game to combine strategy and action and succeed, and you'd sort of be right. It's probably too easy on the action side to be challenging in that way, and it lacks real depth as a strategy game. Don't get me wrong - these are not critical faults, as the game is immensely playable; it just won't make action heads of strategy gamers and action lovers won't find much real action here. The reason it almost makes it but doesn't quite get there is because the difference between the tactical elements and the strategic are not huge. If you could actually get into your tanks and such and control them it would have been much better, as this would set the scene for true tactical warfare. As it is, the 3D view serves more as a different perspective to the overhead view rather than 'a different way to play the same game'.

I can see how TA purists will diss this game as a lesser TA clone with 3D. True, there are many similarities, but Armor Command and any games of its ilk that follow have the potential to merge two genres in a way that will benefit both. Armor Command just falls that little bit short of being a killer title.

George Argy

PLUS+

http://www.ripcordgames.com/ - There's a patch out already with improved sounds and fixes some minor gameplay issues.



86%

Category	Action/Strategy
Players	1-4
Publisher	Ripcord
Price	$TBA
Rating	G
Available	Now

For Looks great, feels right, easy to play. This could possibly be the start of something huge...

Against Not a great deal of depth. More units would have been nice. Unit commands can be difficult at times.

Need P90 with 3D card or P166 without, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 30MB HDD, Win95

Want P166, 32MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM, Direct 3D supported card

3D SUPPORT

Um, all of them. If your card ain't supported, it's probably too obscure - get another card.

STAR TREK PINBALL

It's pinball, Jim, but not as we know it...

Have you heard Urusei Yatsura's "Phasers On Stun"? It borders on genius, let me tell you. Together with fellow Scots, the casually astonishing Mogwai, they are creating some of the most exciting music you can hear right now. Which just leaves the question - what is it about Scottish noise terrorists and a deep love of science fiction?

But anyway. Pinball has also long been influenced by various science fiction films and TV series. You name the sci-fi cult and I'll give you the appropriately themed pinball machine. All of which explains why I won't poke fun at Interplay's newest release, Star Trek Pinball. No matter how tempting it may seem at first.

Authentic flavour

Providing a reasonable attempt at emulating that authentic pinball flavour, all three tables have been tilted back into the screen. I have some reservations about this tactic. While the 3D effect is nice (and I mean that in a "damning with faint praise" kinda way), it does inevitably mean that the ball often disappears out of view and because everything is so small anyway (necessarily, too, so as to squeeze the whole table onto one screen) it can be tricky to see where it reappears. Not to mention tricky to see, period.

Onto the quality of the tables themselves, there's a respectable mix of styles resulting in one excellent, one mediocre, and one good (but somewhat "different") table. To Boldly Go is easily the best of the trio, although it could well have been renamed Do Androids Dream Of Captain James T Kirk, given the prominence of numerous female aliens to whom Kirk had previously taught the meaning of love. Here there's a satisfying variety of ramps and targets to go for, with the rewards for doing so readily apparent. The Transporter ramp is a terrific idea, as is the Target Range where you shoot down enemy spacecraft (one of the few features to fully exploit the extra freedom allowed in computerised pinball).

Having Kirk stare at you like that while playing is a tremendously motivating force

Awkward loops

Less impressive is Qapla, the Klingon themed table. With a preponderance of awkward loops and one maddeningly placed lock, this one caused me much needless frustration. Despite the cool idea of playing as a Klingon ship trying to destroy the Enterprise, I was pretty bored within the (hyper)space of a few games. Of more interest is the final table, Nemesis, if only because it is the first genuine two-player game of pinball I have seen. The table is split vertically into two sections, bridged by a ramp. Progressing through five rounds, the two players compete to be the first to accomplish various missions. These missions range from eliminating all targets to hitting a specific target then opening and escaping through a gate. Heightening the competitiveness is the way you can lob a ball onto your opponent's side to distract them or foil their mission. I thought it worked unexpectedly well, once my friend and I eventually figured out exactly what the missions entailed.

The manual becomes predictably excited about the use of speech and sound effects from the original TV series. Yet, while the latter add no end to the atmosphere (I never tired of the thrill of hearing that transporter sound or phaser blast or whatever), the voices are horribly overused. Playing Nemesis with McCoy mentioning something about Spock being dead every five seconds is quite conceivably the most annoying thing in the world.

David Wildgoose

76%

Category	Pinball Sim
Players	1-4
Publisher	Interplay
Price	$TBA
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	One great table. One unique two-player table. Cool FX.
Against	One ordinary table. Speech annoys and the graphics are a tad small.
Need	P90, 16Mb RAM, 2xCD
Want	P133, 32Mb RAM

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POWERBOAT RACING

Surely Speed 2 couldn't have that much of an influence over the games industry, could it? Whatever the reason, VR sports have jumped on the bandwagon with this very arcadey racer.

If you fancy tooling around some of the world's greatest waterways wrecking environmental havoc in a glorified dinghy, then Powerboat Racing could be the game for you. There are 8 tracks to choose from, like New York harbour, the Grand Canyon and even the Amazon River. It's a damn shame that there's no Venetian hidden level where you get points for capsizing every tourist-filled gondola that you pass, though.

Ain't no sim...

As well as tracks, there are quite a few boats to choose from too. There are two different hulls: monohulls which are easy to control but lack speed, and the catamarans which are the opposite. There are 3 different classes as well - Minnow which are your 850cc jobbies; Pikes that are 1000cc and then there's the beastly Barracuda weighing in at 1150ccs. Each boat behaves differently from manoeuvrability and acceleration to top speed and chick-pulling power - the most important attribute in any speedboat. Although there are these differences, the boats don't handle anything like real boats, so don't expect this game to be a simulator or anything. It's a fun boat racing game and that's about it.

Speaking of fun, there's network support for up to 6 players over a LAN, or you can challenge your not-so-wired friends on your own PC in split-screen mode just like on the toy consoles. And it's as easy as a console game to play - turn left and right, nose up and down and accelerate are all the controls you've got, so gamepad or keyboard is definitely the way to go.

The different race modes are what I liked best about Powerboat Racing. Apart from Practice, there's Arcade, which is race around each track against PC boats. You need to come in the top 3 to continue in a Minnow; top 2 in a Pike and you need to win each race in a Barracuda. Then there's Shootout where you race around a specific track against the PC boats. The last boat at the end of each lap drops out, until only one boat remains. There's also Time Trial and Challenge which are similar modes against shadow boats, which are your previous performances on that track. There are also two 'hidden' modes that are only uncovered if you perform

Cutting edge shimmering water technology. It's probably better if you just drift along though; the water spray technology isn't nearly as impressive

Splishin' splashin' simple fun, an easy arcade hoot

well enough in Arcade mode. The first is Championship mode where you race a championship season. Each time you win you get to step up to a different class of boat, until you're hammering along in a Catamaran Barracuda. The other hidden mode is Slalom, a damn hard style of racing where you have to get around one lap of the track as quickly as possible, but you also have to navigate around buoys on the correct side, otherwise you lose five seconds off your lap time.

Mmmm.. Reflective water...

The graphics aren't bad, but they could have been so much better. The reflective water is cool, but the boat spray is just a mass of white pixels which looks really awful. The game engine is silky smooth though, and it offers the standard 3Dfx options (for those of you wise enough to have purchased a 3D card for your gaming needs) like lens flare and fog.

The sound effects are your standard engine-revving and water-splashing affair, with the commentator adding in a 'great jump' now and then - nothing to write home about here. The music, however, is pretty cool as you can select one of eight CD audio tracks to play before you start the race. There's even one song written for powerboat racer, with eighties-style guitar and rock lyrics - very Days of Thunder!

Not a bad game, just not a very good one either. Think of it as Andretti Racing on water.

George Argy

70%

Category	Racing
Players	1-6
Publisher	VR Sports
Price	$TBA
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	Easy to learn and play. Network play is a hoot.
Against	Graphics could have been much better. Control may be overly simplistic for some.
Need	P133, 16MB RAM, 100MB HDD, 2x CD-ROM, Win95
Want	P166, 32MB RAM, 3Dfx, gamepad

3D SUPPORT

3Dfx

QUEEN: The Eye

It's a miracle. This multimedia CD should have appeared in our diversions page, but it's a proper game! With Queen! Magnifico!

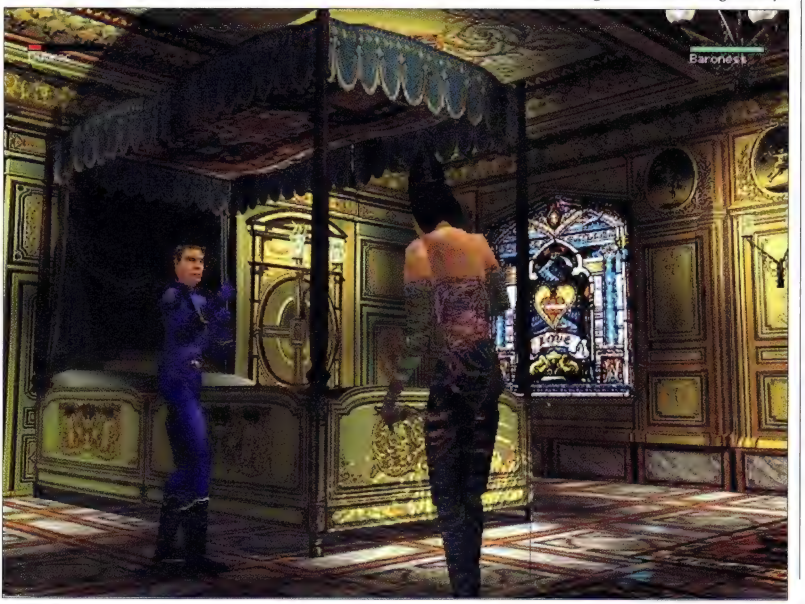
It's a bit weird; fighting/adventure/puzzle/trippy, but hey, it's Queen!

Some games emerge from the foetid imaginations of programming geniuses. Others start off as a germ of an idea and are either honed and realised through focused thinking and technical skill, or destroyed by the committee mentality. But Queen: The Eye must be the first game to exist thanks to a large record company's eagerness to splash cash in the direction of one of its most cherished pop groups.

A proper game

This, you would imagine, is a bad thing - and if you thought back to the rash of barrel-scraping multimedia dross into which the record industry ploughed vast amounts of cash in the early 1990s, you'd be inclined to feel embarrassed for Queen. The collapse of the multimedia industry has spared us from any more CD-Roms like Sting's All This Time (in which the rainforest loving, whiny-voiced mega-millionaire memorably gave us a presumably unintentional glimpse of his meat and two veg while demonstrating a tricky digitised video yoga move clad in an ethnic loincloth). But all that record company loot, it seems, is now being channelled into games. For Queen: The Eye, is a proper game.

To be precise, it is an action-adventure effort in which, as in Tomb Raider, you control a character which veers between fighting and solving puzzles. The fighting element is along beat-em-up lines (with a daunting list of two and three-button punches, kicks and combinations), which at least gives it a bit of differentiation. The plot, meanwhile, is music-related - although somewhat tangentially.

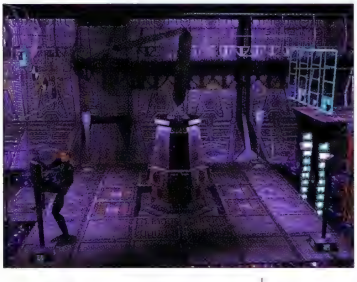


Set, inevitably, in a post-apocalyptic world controlled by the all-seeing Eye computer, you play Dubroc (why do game characters always have to have some sub-Tolkienesque name?), once one of The Eye's enforcers, but now condemned to fight for the nation's enjoyment in the Arena, as a result of inadvertently tuning in to a snatch of music. The Eye, you see, has banned all forms of music. Although, confusingly, a snatch of We Will Rock You plays as the game kicks off in the Arena.

Fight!

The first part of the game is probably the most enjoyable. Pitched into the Arena, you must instantly memorise as many of the fighting moves as possible, because various baddies - some even armed, rather unsportingly - immediately pitch up and try to beat the crap out of you. You, on the other hand, must beat them off and traverse the Arena in search of various objects which will help you escape, as well as any weaponry lying around.

Once you do escape and move on to one of the other worlds (there are five CDs in all), the game becomes more focused on puzzle-solving, although you still get to indulge in the occasional



"I'm just a poor boy, from a poor family"

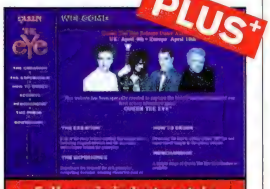
ruck. In basic terms, it's not a bad point-and-click effort: characterisations are good, there are flashes of humour and the whole feel is pleasantly quirky. It also looks absolutely stunning, and considerable technical expertise has been expended, for example, on the character's faces - despite being a full 3D game, their lips actually move in sync with speech. But any purist will have noticed some of the game's gaping flaws seconds after initial boot-up.

Camera confusion

The biggest problem is the sheer slowness with which Dubroc moves - if you want to get a good laugh, make him do what the manual laughably describes as "running". In general, when you try to encourage him to fight, he is hopelessly unresponsive, and the whole fighting process is a bit random, since there are far too many moves to remember unless you've done one of those memory courses. And then there are the camera angles. Camera angles are rather important in a free-roaming 3D action-adventure game, but Destination Design, the developer, has got them hopelessly wrong. It's not uncommon for a fight to take place in the netherworld between cameras, which is very disorientating when they constantly switch around.

Nevertheless, Queen: The Eye isn't a complete dog. In the initial stages, it's rather compelling (although simultaneously infuriating), and there won't be that many better-looking games out this year. But it's one for hard-core Queen fans (the soundtrack consists of 54 Queen tracks, "many specially remixed for the game") rather than hard-core gamers. With Sony readying a Spice Girls game, we hope that it doesn't single a disturbing new trend.

Steve Boxer



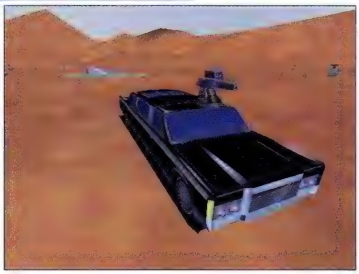
60%

Category	Action/adventure
Players	1
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Price	$TBA
Rating	TBA
Available	Now
For	Super-crisp graphics, agreeable levels of weirdness, music if you like Queen.
Against	Unwieldy action controls, slow-moving characters, appalling camera-work, music if you have any taste.
Need	Pentium 90, 16Mb RAM
Want	Pentium 133, 32Mb RAM, 3D graphics card.

INTERSTATE '76 ARSENAL

Badass blacksploitation characters with magnificently kinky afro's, Jane Fonda lookalikes with Lara-like dimensions, and weird inbred mechanics...? Oh yes, you're back in the world of Interstate '76

Rather than just have one character, I76 Nitro lets you play as four charcters- including Taurus and his pimped-up caddy



Like Taurus says, It's time to get funked up again. Yes, Activision have caught on and realised that there's money to be milked out of their games by releasing add-on and compilation packs for just about everything, and so we're being given the opportunity to return to the badlands of Texas for some more auto-destruction in tooled up 70's muscle cars. Yeah, baby!

This pack includes both the 'Gold' edition and the 'Nitro' expansion pack for I76. The gold pack isn't all that much to write home about however, it's really only a patched up version of the original with out of the box 3D suppport - so there's nothing there that you can't download for free from the Internet. It's a nice inclusion though, especially for those that aren't fortunate enough to have access to the 'net, as well as those people that missed out on I76 the first time around.

Beware though, the 3Dfx support for the original I76 isn't all that great - it requires a fairly hefty machine to be able to actually run it with any detail whatsoever. Anyway, it's a nice inclusion if nothing spectacular, and though it's been a long while since I've played the original missions, it was great fun to start going through them once again - the cutscenes are still excellent, and the gameplay (for the most part) is still cool.

Don't get out of the car

However, the Nitro pack is probably the main attraction, and rightly so. For starters, you get a revamped and revitalised 3D engine, with out of the box support for most flavours of accceleration cards - and this time you can expect more than a slide show on an average PC. In fact, the engine this time around is highly impressive, the cars fly around, there's heaps more detail in your surroundings, and best of all the explosions of your enemies seem much brighter and crisper too. As for the actual missions...well...they are nicely done, suitably taxing for those that have conquered the original missions. However, as I stated before, the cutscenes from the original and the gradually unfolding storyline was a major reason why the original was so enjoyable. The Nitro pack doesn't have the same continuity, and while there are cut scene introductions to the missions for the Nitro pack they serve as explanations of the missions rather than as part of a larger storyline. It's a bit of a dissapointment really, but there are plenty of things on the plus side to balance things out. Like that you take on the role of Jade Champion, Taurus, and Skeeter in three different (though linked) sets of misisons. There are around 18 or so in total, as well as three or four with a mystery persona once you have conquered the others. I don't want to spoil it for you, but, well, I'm going to. The badass dude is this guy called Natty Dread, and for the missions you get to tool around and fight as a bad guy - I love that - and best of all you get to try and take out Taurus. Now, come on, admit it, who didn't 'accidentally' take out Taurus once or twice in the original game? Thought so...

Anyway, for those of you that finished I76 and are thirsty for some more auto-carnage, this should be a worthwile purchase, especially taking into account the cut-rate price. And for those that haven't yet had the pleasure of popping some Sister Sledge on the turntable, getting groovy in your seat and blowing the crap out of some redneck auto bandit - now's a good time to get started!

Gareth Jones

78%

Category	Road Rage Sim
Players	1-8 (TCP/IP,IPX,Mod, Ser)
Publisher	Activision
Price	$49.95
Rating	MA15+
Available	Now
For	More schlock 70's fun, an updated game engine that rocks hard, varied and enjoyable missions. Also, you can play as Taurus...and you can kill Taurus too.
Against	The missions aren't all that coherent, and a bit more of a storyline would have been nice. Perhaps a few more missions would have been nice too.
Need	P133, 16MB RAM, 2xCD
Want	P200, 64MB RAM, 12xCD, 3Dfx

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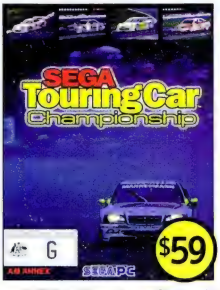
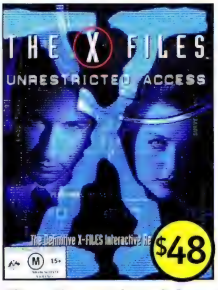
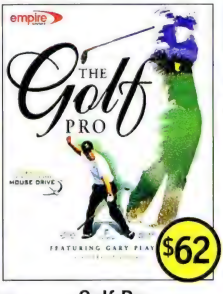


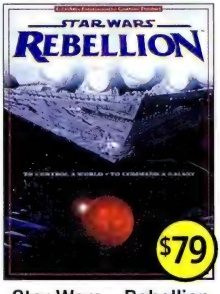
SEGA Touring Car



X-Files Unrestricted Access



Golf Pro



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DARK REIGN: Rise of the Shadowhand

The time of hanging out is over Dark Reign fans, more action awaits!

Not too long ago the words "Expansion pack" in the world of RTS games meant a bunch of hodge podge missions slapped together for a quick and easy cash grab. Rise of the Shadowhand is a welcomed change of pace in this sorry history of RTS expansions, as the extra missions and new units included are storylinked adding a bit of extra flavour to the Dark Reign universe. The surprise with the new units, is that they replace existing units creating a new variant of the Freedom Guard (now know as the Freedom Guard Xenite army) and the even more dastardly Imperium Shadowhand. Playing with these new armies, means saying farewell to a few goodies like the Imperium Plasma Tank and the Freedom Guard's Tachion Tank but the replacements are just as powerful if not more so. The non-expanded versions of the Imperium and Freedom Guard still exist so there are now four armies in total.

New units!

The Shadowhand are a secretive Imperium organisation that are branching out into experimental and volatile computer AI experiments called the Osiris project. This new technology is the backing for new units such as the Reaper, an eight foot tall robotic killing machine armed with a neutron rifle. The Gemini Tank is a strong assault vehicle, specially noted for it's capability to divert power from weapons to engines giving it a speed bonus usually not available to a tank of it's firepower and size. Even better is the Fury. A walking mech thing of mayhem that also doubles as an all terrain vehicle. More ho-hum is the Hades Bomber, the latest in napalm "Death from above" flying vehicles. The new unit for the sneaky strategy is the EMP Device, which when detonated in an area stops an enemy commander from giving orders to his troops..for a limited time.

Predicted as a multiplayer favourite. The Freedom Guard Xenite army contains new units themed along the lines of bio-weaponry. The Gant is an all terrain giant insect that's powerful claws are adept at delivering destruction to both armour and infantry units. The Gant's big brother is the Grendal a giant heavily armoured killing machine, that will take on the best the Imperium can offer and often come out best. Both of these valuable but chaotic creatures must be kept under control by building Freedom Guard Rangers. The special Freedom Guard unit is the Power Striker which can shutdown all of the buildings on screen, which like the Shadowhand's new EMP device is a havoc causer. Other new units are included in the package, but are dullish affairs like upgraded troop transports (but with a better gun) and the like. The new arsenal does make a change in both sides' playing style. The Shadowhand perform better than standard issue Imperium on rough terrain maps. The Xenite Freedom Guard comes out with increased firepower but without sacrificing their trademark mobility. Just that they now have to play zoo-keeper to get the job done.

New multi-maps

The 20 new missions concern a Freedom Guard transport crash landing on a isolated Shadowhand controlled planet. Both sides vie for supremacy, gaining the new techs as the missions progress. Prepare for an ego-bruising as the difficulty level is extremely high proving a challenge for even the most seasoned Dark Reign veterans. On the multiplayer front are a swag of new maps plus seven co-op missions where you tackle the AI in pre-made scenarios. Whether you are looking for a quality single player campaign, or want to be decked out with the latest gear when playing multiplayer over the Net, Rise of the Shadowhand is a goer.

Pete Sharpe

PLUS+

AURAN

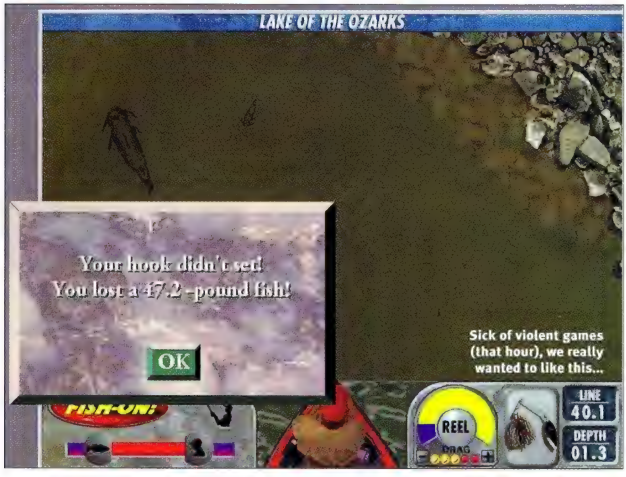
www.auran.com -Large selection of units for download, including a new side called The Terrorists.

80%

Category	Real time strategy
Players	Activision
Publisher	1-8
Price	$29.95
Rating	G8+
Available	Now
For	The Editor has been updated with the new units and environment graphics.
Against	The Dark Reign total conversion included on the CD is pretty weak. You still have to hit the Net to find all the extra tasty unit and total conversions out there.
Need	Original Dark Reign.
Want	Nothing special

TROPHY BASS 2

Hmmmmm. Not a whisper of Rex Hunt graces the face of this wannabe fishing champions' simulation.

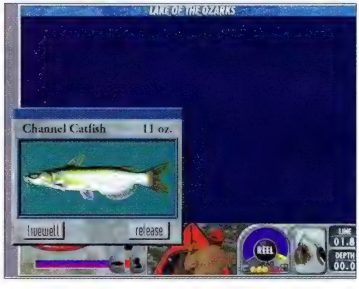


I know what you're thinking, like "Why the hell would you wanna do that ?!" Well. If video tips from 1996 Angler of the year Kevin VanDam, along with scintillating "action" music when you hook a big one isn't enough for you, then something's definitely wrong. Trophy Bass appears to be, in all respects, a serious attempt at simulation with enough configurable options to utterly overflow your mind with Fishing trivia until you think you're going to throw up.

For instance, you can customize the rod weight, line strength, reel speed, casting type, lure type, lure colour, lure size, lure buoyancy and virtual lake that you are fishing on.

Wield your mighty rod

Amongst this voluminous array of options lies the perfect setup for the conditions and fish you're aiming for. You're only after Bass fish in this title, although this doesn't stop you from catching catfish, which just get thrown back. So you pick a lake, a rod, reel & lure and tackle the big muscle fish of your chosen waters. After doing a quick visual scan of the overall picture, you select a choice location to cast off, which I now know is probably the deeper waters or near structures and tree shady zones. Having done that, you do a quick visual scan of the water, find a fish and throw your line in about where you reckon you want it to be. Your throw can be approximated by the computer, or you can choose to manually cast, with the mouse providing analog input to the rod. Once in the water, you orient the rod directionally, and reel in at an appropriate speed, to drag the bait past the fish's nose, or close by with the appropriate movement pattern to imitate the baitfish you are trying to emulate.



It bites

It might bite, it might not, at which point you can try a better throw, or consult the pros, viewing a random video of a hot tip inline, which might help, and then again might not. So you change your gear, or change your throw, whatever, to try and entice the fish to bite. Occasionally the videos you're viewing again and again produce some useful insight, which you can apply to the situation you're at, but it seems mostly to be a case of trying to remember all the distinct strategies.

Unfortunately you can't pick a brand of Virtual Beer, or Virtual Boat with onboard jacuzzi, or virtually fall overboard and virtually drown, but you can't have everything I suppose. A virtual stir-fry of the Basses once you've caught them, or even a virtual gutting process, to get that hunter-gatherer rush of catching and killing something edible would be a nice reward for the nitpicking effort of researching the game and all the settings to achieve the killer setup for the situation.

This game is completely serious in many respects, but it shouldn't be confused with the arcade fishing game, of hallowed VR style graphics, this title is utterly 2 dimensional in all respects. The water surface is rendered in a uniform flat shade, with rudimentary animations giving a faint impression of wave movement.

Hendry Saunders

PLUS+
SIERRA SPORTS
It's a Whole New Ballgame!
http://www.sierrasports.com/frame_fish.html

40%

Category	Sport Fishing Sim
Players	Front Page Sports
Publisher	1-2
Price	Sierra
Rating	$TBA
Available	Now
For	Impressive articulation of sport fishing into computer game format, with nice cheesy videos of the celebrity fishing Americans giving you advice.
Against	Unfortunately simplistic graphics don't even let you enjoy the scenery, letting the game down sorely. Also not a single mention of Rex Hunt, is a painful insult to Australian fishing enthusiasts, perhaps immeasurably so.
Need	486 DX-66, 8 Megs RAM, 2X CD-ROM, SVGA monitor, mouse
Want	Pentium, 16 megs RAM, Win95 for multiplayer.

Magic the Gathering: Special Edition

CATEGORY	Strategy
PLAYERS	1-2
PUBLISHER	MicroProse
PRICE	TBA
RATING	TBA
AVAILABLE	Now
NEED	P100, 16Mb RAM, WIN95
WANT	P133, 32Mb RAM

overall

69%

Great pickup for Magic newbies. For the rest of us ho-hum, next real deal expansion please.

You've been a loyal MicroProse Magic customer for over a year now. Purchased the original game when it came out, and then the Spells of the Ancients expansion when it was released. You walk into the games shop and spy this "Special Edition" on the shelf. Mmm that seems a bit odd, what's so special about it you wonder? Apart from the inclusion of Manalink, the multiplayer upgrade which you can get for free download off the Net, the big whammy is the inclusion of a selection of 80 cards from the Dark and Legends expansion sets. I say whammy because the only way you can get these new cards is by forking out for this "Special Edition" which means buying the full version of Magic plus the Spells expansion pack all over again.

The Dark and Legend cards included are not the cream of the crop. Most are minor cards such as the Krimson Kobolds out of Legends or the Elves of Deep Shadow out of The Dark. There are some quality inclusions like the Exorcist and Hidden Path, but I'm sure most people would be wanting things like the Maze of Ith..no go I'm afraid. So does the Magic player really want this? Depends on where you're coming from. If you are new to Magic and want to leap in, well this is the perfect package. You get multiplayer and all the cards available in one nice bundle. On the other hand if you already own Magic and Spells of the Ancients, and have a relatively inexpensive/easy way to download the 70mb Manalink update and can live without the fairly average new cards you can skip this and save some dosh.

Not familiar with Magic the Gathering? It's a card game... on PC... and it's not bad... go figure...

Magic is a great game on the PC, and multiplayer is a hoot. All your Internet games are played for free and ranked on Gathering.net (hosted by TEN in the states,

rumoured to soon arrive on Aussie TEN). LAN, modem and serial support is also part of Manalink so everybody is catered for. Really though, in the future Microprose should ditch this "Special Edition" crap or at least put out normal expansions so there is a sensible upgrade path for all Magic fans.

Pete Sharpe

Monty Python's Meaning of Life

CATEGORY	Pretend Adventure
PLAYERS	1
PUBLISHER	Take 2
PRICE	$TBA
RATING	M
AVAILABLE	Now
NEED	P90, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD
WANT	To rent Monty Python & the Holy Grail on video

overall

57%

Only for the die-hard Python fan with an inexhaustible wallet.

"The First Game Designed Exclusively for the Betterment of Humanity". Or so says the back of the box. Well, I wouldn't quite go that far. But if a certain portion of my Fellow Man can achieve a degree of physical or spiritual enlightenment thanks to this double CD of multimedia shenanigans, then good luck to them. The world's a better place and all that.

So you set out on a quest to uncover "The Meaning Of Life", progressing through eight chapters of point-and-click adventuring. Stages of life, such as Birth, Growth and Learning, Live Organ Transplants, etc, are negotiated by simply scanning each screen for hotspots and clicking on them. Gently amusing, or just plain ridiculous, animations ensue, revealing new locations to explore or excitingly different hotspots to click on. Most of the gameplay is merely a case of methodically clicking on things as they appear - your enjoyment entirely hinged upon how side-splittingly hilarious you find the animations. Yet, despite the Monty Python influence, the jokes are only sporadically funny.

Occasionally you'll discover a more involving section that may require you to prompt a bizarre dinner conversation between a dull middle-aged couple or perform some precision surgery with a collection of power tools, for example. But again, these fail to hit the mark. While the more original (not to mention more interactive) sequences may seem cool when first encountered, actually completing them is almost certainly an unutterable chore. Perhaps the funniest moment comes from spying the label on the box which reads, "Contains hours of new material from all of the Pythons". All?! One of them's been dead for years! D'oh!

Although marginally closer to being a proper game than previous Monty Python releases, The Meaning Of Life still tends towards a peculiar style of pseudo interaction much-loved by marketing types and the clueless mainstream press. This is a game for people who don't really understand what a game can be.

David Wildgoose

Seen the video? Know the dialogue backwards? Got the book? Watched Terry Gilliams Baron Von Munchhausen? Sat through Michael Palin travelling the world a couple of times? You might want to play this then

Sim Safari

Any game where you can click a button to generate a fleet of hippos has to score points in the weird department. Sim Safari is a tourism student's dream come true, bringing management of an African Safari Park to the time tested RTS genre.

It plays a lot like Sim city, with the typical cash resource balancing act between the required features to entice and then satisfy the tourist population and not going into the black financially.

You play through three interfaces: The Park itself, where you create an ecological balance and consult your resident Ecologist for scientific advice, the Tourist Camp, where your business manager advises you on the tourist's requirements while they are staying and the Local Village, where you liaise with the Elder to hire assistants for your Safari experience.

There is a big variety of creatures, and indeed plants and trees, which you can add to your Safari, once you have the bare essentials stable, to create some healthy biodiversity. You can have hundreds of animals on screen at once, but they don't all charge each other in a Warcraft-style berserk attack which is kinda disappointing, but also shows us a bit of how we expect violence to be incorporated into every game we play. There's something for the Freudian students among us to ponder over for a while.

When delving into the scientific info to find out how to keep your Gnu's reproducing, you can explore an Encarta type database of real wildlife info, which is kinda interesting and directly useful in your animal management. Although a bit of a homework puzzle for tourism students, Sim Safari has it's good points and is quirky enough to be fun to play, despite the seemingly desperate subject matter it's based around.

Hendry Saunders

"Wildebeast: check. Elephants: check. Zebras: check. Gnus: check. David Attenburough: check."

CATEGORY	Real time Strategy/ Economic Sim
PLAYERS	Maxis
PUBLISHER	1
PRICE	$TBA
RATING	G8+
AVAILABLE	Now
NEED	486, 16 Megs RAM, Win95
WANT	P90, 4X CD-ROM

overall

60%

It's well fleshed out, and more of the good stuff for fans of the voluminous "Sim" series. Real African animal information gives it some "edutainment" value.

Wolfenstein 3D

You don't seriously expect me to review this game for you, do you? I mean, if you've never played Wolfenstein 3D then you really have no right to hold this hallowed tome in your hands right now.

The game that launched a thousand clones is back on the shelves, the only difference being you can run it under Win95 with no XMS problems. This is the full version of Wolf3D and also Spear of Destiny, two games that undisputedly kicked off the first-person shooter genre. I could sit here and tell you that it took away about a month of my life, as it did to most of my friends. I could sit here and say it was the reason I bought a soundcard, even though 8-bit Sound Blasters were hundreds of dollars at the time. But you've most probably been there and done that yourselves.

You're probably wondering why in hell Activision have chosen to re-release Wolf 3D and Spear Of Destiny so late in the piece. It's a question that confused me too. All I can think of is that it's kind of a promo for Hexen II and Quake II for those that still haven't played either game, as the shareware versions of both come bundled in the package. As far as value for money goes it would have been nice if Doom and Doom II were thrown into the picture, considering these two games are now essentially free (well, the source code is available on the net, so you can grab it and compile your own copy). Still, for those feeling nostalgic and bored with the sameness of the current crop of 3D games, maybe it's time to go retro.

George Argy

"Achtung!! It iz von off zoes swine-hundts from ze future, come back to play becauze sick undt tired off ze "eternal hardvare upgrade" rubbish. Eat pixel death, dumbkopf!!"

CATEGORY	3D Corridor Shooter
PLAYERS	1
PUBLISHER	Activision
PRICE	$TBA
RATING	MA
AVAILABLE	Now
NEED	386/33, 640K RAM, 1x CD-ROM, 3MB HDD, DOS 5.0
WANT	Not much more, a soundcard helps a bit.

overall

Special Retro Scoring System

10/10

How else do you score an absolute gaming classic?

CARRIER: Fortress at Sea

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The carriers has the biggest shaft in the world... oh no! We're doing it again!

flight, through to the close-in, last resort Phalanx defensive system, which spits out 6000 rounds per minute under full computer controlled autonomy at missiles which have managed to penetrate all other carrier defenses. Very exciting stuff for lads like us, easily excited and impressed by things big, powerful, expensive and high tech - with the Carrier Battle Group being the ultimate realisation of these wonderful attributes.

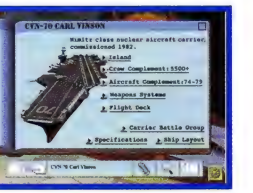
Lovers of all things military will, of course, already own a sizable collection of books. Big

glossy pictures, technical cutaways... It sends a shiver of joy down my spine just thinking about it... This is the multimedia alternative. Carrier: Fortress at Sea has been put together by the very respectable people at the Discovery Channel. It's a different flavour of experience to the regulation coffee-table book; it lacks the big'n'beautiful glossy photos that get stared at, trancelike, for hours, but it does include moving parts. Normally these multimedia 'experiences' disappoint with a mere handful of very brief and very tiny movies. While the Carrier movies are matchbox in size, there's a ton of them. This is one of those CDs where you'll peek and poke around and find new stuff each time you load it up. Besides the expected abundance of take off and landing footage, there are many enlightening insights into the day to day operations of an aircraft carrier. Candid interviews with all variety of crew, with a curiously disproportionate amount of time dedicated to the ship's laundry. The voice-over narrative is sadly gung-ho American, which at times felt like nothing but very bad - almost WWII Pathe news style, propaganda.

The essential database makes up for any annoying Americanisms. It's huge and designed to allow an easy flow of information, with hotlinks to related sections that make poking around the CD an almost net surfing-like experience.

This CD was surprisingly impressive. Highly recommended to all that are into this stuff, and the lighthearted, TV style narrative opens up the world of high tech military goodness to those with only a passing interest.

Ben Mansill



NORMANDY: The Great Crusade

Discovery Channel Interactive $59.95 from Roadshow

IF IT WEREN'T FOR THEM, WE WOULDN'T BE WHAT WE ARE TODAY.

The sheer enormity of the Normandy invasion - Operation Overlord, is awe-inspiring and moving. That the Allies managed to keep the destination of the largest invasion force ever assembled secret is stunning. Equally mind-boggling is the sheer magnitude of the gamble involved: a million soldier's lives thrown at Rommel's Atlantic Wall in a last-chance, all or nothing bid to free Europe, vanquish Hitler and secure the future of the free world for generations to come.

It's powerful stuff that deserves to be treated with reverence and respect. Discovery's CD on the subject gives it just that. This product; yet another 'multimedia CD', should more properly be referred to as an 'Interactive Documentary'. It's just brilliant. The voice over narrative is sombre and respectful in tone, and intelligent in content. The seemingly endless movie clips are of the highest standard, inducing that inner peace feeling of heightened comprehension that only comes from watching a quality documentary.

While the movie segments alone warrant the purchase of the CD, you'll, of course, be wanting more. At any point in

the narrative you can listen to radio broadcasts that relate to whatever event is showing on screen, read letters sent to and from soldiers and read newspaper front pages. It's an overdose of WWII that I never tired of. I never wanted it to end. When it eventually did, the grainy black and white footage I'd been watching for an hour unexpectedly gave way to the first colour images to appear - Normandy as it is today. The camera slowly panned over a seemingly endless landscape of gravestones. There was no voice over for most of this. It just wasn't necessary.

Veterans of the era should all be sent this CD as a matter of course, for them the nostalgia trip would, I expect, be intense. As for the rest of the population, I can't think of anyone who wouldn't be enthralled by Normandy: The Great Crusade. Superb.

Ben Mansill

Who do you think you are kidding Mr Hitler, if you think we're on the run...

WINGS OVER EUROPE

Discovery Channel Interactive $59.95 from Roadshow

"TALLY HO ROLLY, THE FOKKERS ARE COMING UP BEHIND YOU!"

This 'Wings' multimedia CD comes from Discovery, as does the mostly excellent 'Carrier' CD (previous page). Unlike the Carrier CD though, this is a bit of a disappointment.

Two big problems - 1. The interface is simply awful, 2. There's just not enough stuff on it. These are two things a 'multimedia' CD must have. The interface problem is not one of cheap and nasty design, but of bad design. Everything's been made to simulate the insides of a typical WWII airbase, it's all dirty and grimy, you're supposed to click on wall posters to access some stuff, other obscure objects require clicking too and it's fiddly, unintuitive and messy. Salvation should have come via the main icons that appear at the top, but these don't include sensible functions like 'Return to Main menu', further increasing the frustration.

Anyway, the planes... Here's another bother. There are only eight aircraft covered in detail. These do not include either the Dehavilland Mosquito or the Hawker Hurricane! Unbelievable! So, you watch the movie segment about each plane, discover that the movies aren't usually about the planes specifically, but the particular battle they were famed for or the clever hidden German factories - or whatever, but rarely focussing on the actual aircraft.

There is one monumental positive though, for this multimedia CD has its very own Troy McClure! Go to just about any screen, and a moment after it loads the Troy steps into view, rests one foot on the corner of some hidden object and gives a regulation Troy speech in true Troy-talk. We tested the effect this had, calling passers by in, loading a Troy screen and without exception, enjoying their mirth.

This one just never gets off the ground.

Ben Mansill

BYZANTINE: The Betrayal

Discovery Channel

PERFECT! SEE THE WORLD WITHOUT GETTING UP FROM YOUR DESK.

Travel is something that everyone should do while they're young enough to enjoy it - and though Australia is a fantastic country there's a lot to be learnt from overseas people; their customs, religions, and the history of countries and places that have been around ever since humans started recording history. However, travelling abroad also requires bucketloads of money, plenty of spare time (i.e. a very understanding boss who can do without you for three or four months), and would in most cases require you to spend inordinate amounts of time away from computer games and your PC in general - not a happy prospect for any self-respecting gamer.

Virtual travel

Thankfully, there are quite a few web sites that offer virtual travel, along with a few 'multimedia experiences' on sale around town. But for the most part, they're dry and boring experiences - something maybe to look at for a few minutes while the tea is brewing, but not the stuff night long virtual journeys are made of. From Discovery Multimedia comes this offering, which isn't a multimedia experience, isn't a hokey attempt to throw a few pictures of some exotic far away place on a CD with some sound snippets and links to selected camel fanciers sites. In fact, Byzantine is much more like a game than an educational/infotainment style experience, and even though you probably hate the idea as much as I do - if you're not careful you might learn something. It's another CD experience that falls into the 'interactive movie' genre, with an Omni-3D style engine for the bits where you wander around in (almost) photo-realistic scenery and pick up the important stuff, and then FMV clips as introductions to each new place of travel, or when characters chat to each other or you. It makes for an interesting experience, because though it feels like a game, smells like a game, and for all intents and purposes is a game, Byzantine is also a (sort of) learning experience. With the reality of the backdrops, and the cinematic cut scenes, you really get to feel like you're in Turkey, exploring the side alleys and bazaars, and generally doing a bit of sightseeing.

See what happens when you leave the safety of your gaming room and go overseas on holidays- you get arrested

Infotainment

Don't be put off by the infotainment tag though, this is quite fun to play, with a decent storyline and plenty of investigation to be done. The story runs that you are a fledgling investigative journalist who receives a call from an old friend, Emre. He wants you to come to Istanbul, Turkey, because there's a story well worth investigating, and as it turns out, it deals with a conspiracy of thieves and smugglers that are plundering antiques form the Byzantine period. Upon your arrival, it turns out that Emre is in hiding, hiding from the police, hiding from the smugglers, and has had to resort to leaving cryptic messages around for you to find him. During the course of your investigation, and your attempts to find Emre, you end up going to a number of locations, and the best part is that all the scenery is realistic. Byzantine: The Betrayal was filmed entirely on location in Turkey, and apart from a few actors with decidedly B-grade skills, presents a convincing and entertaining world for you to explore. It's the kind of thing perhaps best suited to those with a penchant for adventure games, as there is a fair amount of puzzle solving, and times when you need to find 'object a' and use it with 'object b' and so on, but still the degree of quality and professionalism put into this should make an attractive option for those times when the hard core gaming is just a bit too taxing for you.

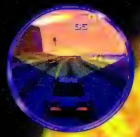
Gareth Jones

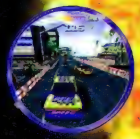
THE ULTIMATE 3D GAMES PACK

NOW AT ITS LOWEST PRICE EVER!

Apocalypse

Fast and fierce multi-player over the internet, LAN or modem lets you race with anyone.





The Apocalyse 3Dx Graphics card now comes with the Ultimate 3D racing game — Ultim@te Race Pro — the game for those who like to drive fast and never let anything or anyone get in their way!

POWERVR

ULTIM@TE RACE PRO

Don't Forget 'SonicStorm' *Advanced PCI sound card.*

It's time to accelerate your PC's sound system. Play your games as they're meant to be played, with your ears exploding!

Ultim@te Race Pro was designed specifically for Power VR technology, so you'll receive the most awesome realistic metal crunching 3D ride of your life. And with 4MB of 3D Mega-horsepower under the hood of the Apocalyse 3Dx, *the roads will never be safe again.*

RING NOW ON FREECALL 1800 067722

Power VR 3D graphics cards now have over 100 compatible games, and 180 more to be made by 1999.

www.videologic.com
www.powervr.com

Check out our website for a full list.

VideoLogic

POWER VR IS THE ULTIMATE IN 3D GAMING TECHNOLOGY

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Fax (+613) 9722 2104 Email: videologic@o031.aone.net.au

Double your Game speed

Putting two Voodoo 2 3D accelerators in your PC makes the games run twice as fast. It's called SLI Mode.

WHAT IS SLI?

SLI stands for Scan Line Interleaved and actually allows 2 (3Dfx say same company - but we're going to put that to the test!) Voodoo 2 cards to be linked together with a small ribbon cable and share the processing.

Whilst one card calculates all the odd scan lines (that's 1,3,5,7,9,11 etc.) the other card calculates all the even scan lines (2,4,6,8,10,12 etc.). The cards working in tandem then output the dually processed frame, convert it to an analog signal and send it to your monitor. It's an incredible indicator of where modern technology has taken us. Beyond exciting, this kind of raw power is something none of us could ever have dreamed of back in the early eighties with our 8 bit computers.

THE BENCHTEST

These figures are definitely most interesting and easily confirmed from 3Dfx and Diamond themselves. It's a good feeling when you hear about something behaving a particular way, then being able to come to the same conclusion using a benchmarking suite. In the case of SLI, as can be seen from the figures, it greatly increases the available fill rate of the card. Fill rate is how fast a polygon can have a texture painted onto it. In the case of 2 SLI'd Voodoo 2's the fill rate is untouchable by any 3D solutions out there. I'd even be willing to bet that this kind of fill rate challenges even RISC based commercial 3D workstations.

AS FAST AS A CRAY SUPERCOMPUTER

As per expectations drawn from last months examination of the Voodoo 2, polygon throughput in SLI mode isn't greatly improved. A 1% increase is most likely a cause of the slight discrepancies in benchmarking more then an increase obtained from the dual card configuration. Potentially though, a very fast Pentium 2 coupled with the fill rate of SLI is going to make for some incredibly polygon rich scenes that move at an amazing speed. This configuration would give games the quality of the arcade game played in the classic "The Last Starfighter". The significance of this? When The Last Starfighter was made back in the eighties, the computer game special effects were rendered on a Cray super computer. Think about it..

In SLI mode, a nice increase was to be had in combined texture, fill and polygon tests. This was a surprise considering the polygon element of the test. An extra 63% however is a very nice increase, especially since a P2 would increase the figures even more.

"Let's just say that with an SLI Voodoo 2 Lara Croft could become a complete woman without any processing difficulties at all."

With the Voodoo 2, Forsaken has never looked so good. The coloured lighting is more vibrant as are all the other colours in the game.

BENCHTEST: VOODOO 2 IN SLI
PREMIUM GAME PERFORMANCE

Cards tested in SLI Mode: 2 x 8 Mb Diamond Monster IIs
Powerbench 3Dfx on a Pentium 200 MMX: 167.902

167.902, *sigh*, 3Dfx, you're turning me into a raving loony. What am I supposed to do? Those numbers are just incredible, phenomenal, amazing.167.902, it's actually approaching the 200 mark which in Powerbench terms is just oh so very amazing. See, it's starting again, I'm raving. 3D cards were just getting boring and I had just about accumulated a certain time earned cynicism. Now with the Voodoo 2 I'm stripped of all my dignity again. Sorry all but I can't contain myself, it's time to jump up and down and do back flips all over the office because SLI mode is a DREAM!

WIN a Creative 12 Mb Voodoo 2!

If you're not already salivating at the thought of your very own Voodoo 2, you're reading the wrong magazine. Never has a piece of hardware had a greater effect on PC gaming. You need one.
Thanks to the kind folks at Creative Pacific, we've got one of their top of the line 12Mb 3D Blaster Voodoo 2 cards to give away. Just write the answer to the easy question on the back of an envelope and send it to:
PC PowerPlay 3D Blaster comp. 78 Renwick St Redfern NSW 2016

Q. What does "SLI" stand for?

SPHERICAL OBJECTS

The final increase was to be had in spherical objects, texture wrapping and polaric mathematics, exactly 50% at that. The sheer power of the Voodoo 2 is just amazing, it's ability to warp and mesh a texture, then apply it to a sphere, or along a polaric path is simply breathtaking. Let's just say that with an SLI Voodoo 2 Lara Croft could become a complete woman without any processing difficulties at all.

Other benefits of SLI mode is that both cards can share memory and it's the only way a Voodoo 2 can render at 1024 x 768. 2 x 8Mb cards will actually give you 8Mb of z buffer memory (allowing for 1024 x 768) and another 8Mb of texture memory. 2 x 12Mb cards will give you 8Mb of Z-buffer and 16Mb of texture memory, oh yeah!

THE REAL WORLD

The real world tests of the Voodoo 2 in SLI outperformed in every way imaginable and yet in some ways failed, though not in the traditional sense of the word failed. Our real world test is Wipeout 2097 and running it at 1024 x 768 was a treat.

Firstly and most interestingly was that the textures on the Wipeout vehicles were at their maximum resolution and were so much more defined. They looked great. Of major note however was the absolute speed. Wipeout 2097 (at 1024 x 768) did not miss a beat, in fact, this was a way in which it failed (if you could call it failing).

As discussed in last month's 3D Tech News concerning the Voodoo 2, a switch can be toggled allowing the Voodoo 2 to sync to the monitor's refresh rate or not. Syncing to your PC's refresh is how games (3D ones in particular) time their output. It's essentially a programming technique that ensures across the board that a game runs at its intended speed and not at either a frighteningly slow speed, or too fast. The switch for the Voodoo 2 is primarily there for benchtesting so users (and reviewers) can grasp just how very fast the card is.

VOODOO 2
The Dark Side- Incompatibilities

As great as the Voodoo 2 is though, it is not without its problems. The first and most major of the realisations to come with this most wondrous of 3D gaming glory is that it does not support every 3Dfx game made. In fact, the number of applications that don't work with it are rather numerous (too many to list here) and actually growing.

All the incompatibilities are mostly to do with the drivers that ship with the Voodoo 2's. The blame also can't be laid at anyone's feet either. Even though I had problems with the Diamond cards, there are reports of equal problems with the Creative Voodoo 2 also. The problems themselves range from texture corruption within an application to the program not working at all. The best fix so far, for both make of card has been to download the actual 3Dfx reference drivers. Which "mysteriously" have been receiving some quite regular updates from their web site.

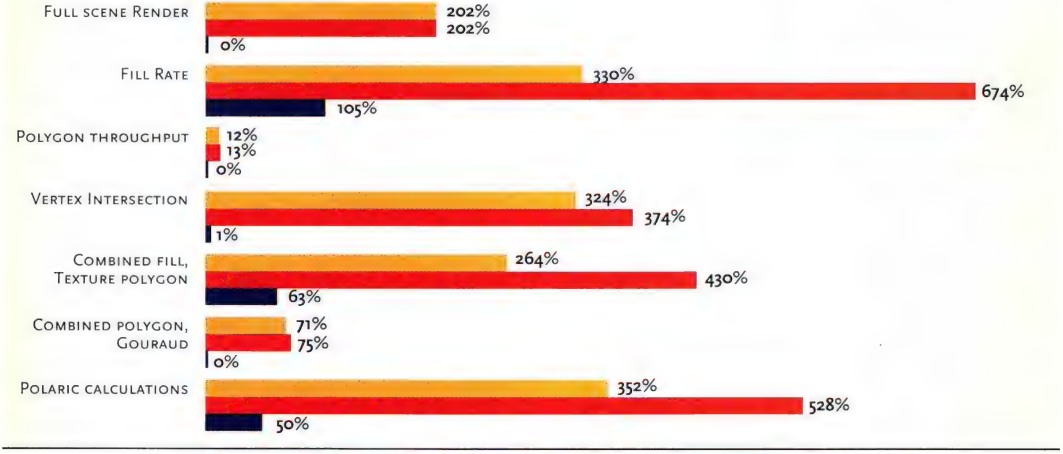
While some games can't be fixed with a driver update companies are rushing to release patches ASAP. Mostly the games affected are quite old so there's not necessarily too much to worry about, but they are incompatibilities none the less.

THE NEW KING

Overall and back to the topic at hand, the Voodoo 2 in SLI mode takes your machine to new heights. On a rounded averaged scale, it takes a Voodoo 2 from being twice as fast as a 3Dfx, to 3 times as fast. This may not seem like a huge leap but it's worth remembering that the fill rate is 7 times faster then an original 3Dfx. Also, to observe the results it's absolutely breathtaking. SLI mode may be a bit pricey (requiring 2 cards), but by far it is most definitely the way of the future and will ensure a little more breathing room before the next generation of 3D accelerator hits.

Forsaken on Voodoo 2

HOW MUCH FASTER ARE 2 VOODOO 2'S IN SLI OVER A STANDARD 3DFX:



PowerVR Generation 2

NEC's promised 3Dfx-killer unveiled

Due soon, this potential Voodoo 2 beater looks all rather exciting. In a 3D Tech News special we have the latest details on the abilities of this card and an interview with the Marketing Director of Videologic, Trevor Wing.

A CHALLENGER TO THE THRONE

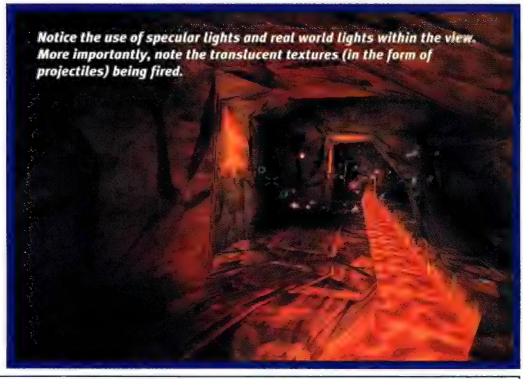
The as yet unnamed (Power VR second generation) is shaping up to be quite a piece of accelerating beauty to behold. For starters, this joint venture project between NEC and Videologic contains a whole new full floating point geometry and setup engine, a hardware tile accelerator, hardware translucency sorting and texture compression. Translucency... Yes!

This is quite exciting because the floating point geometry engine may just make the Power VR less processor dependant then the Voodoo 2, and therefore better for lower end machines. The other functions mean that the PVR 2nd gen will be able to calculate more then 1 million polygons a second (5 times faster then a PCX2 and faster then a Voodoo 2) and have a fill rate of 120 Million pixels per second.

It will also allow for a maximum resolution of 1600 x 1200 at 24 bit colour, Full-scene anti aliasing using image super sampling (discussed in a previous Tech News), Perspective correct ARGB gouraud shading, specular highlights, bump mapping, special volumetric affects and a 32 bit floating point Z buffer. All this potentially adds up to some of the best looking 3D generated scenes available on the market and the PCX 3 will also be fully Direct X 6/Open GL compatible.

ANISOTROPIC FILTERING

Potentially though one of the most exciting additions to the PCX3 is anisotropic filtering. Providing Videologic/NEC pull it off, this will be the first card to incorporate this most incredible technological feat. Anisotropic filtering, for those wondering, is a much superior form of texture filtering that surpasses bi and trilinear filtering. It is a requisite for Microsoft's Talisman standard and by far one of the most intriguing functions of the card.



Notice the use of specular lights and real world lights within the view. More importantly, note the translucent textures (in the form of projectiles) being fired.

Still in the fight

To tell us more about the Power VR 2nd gen, here's Trevor Wing, Marketing Director of Videologic:

Firstly, why was the First Power VR (PCX1) substantially lacking. It had so many unique features but not bi-linear filtering or translucency.

The goal for PowerVR PCX1 was to hit a consumer price point, this meant the silicon die size (and hence cost) limited the feature set. Our customers told us it was more important to hit the price goal than add additional features.

With the incorporation of bi-linear filtering into the PCX2, why was translucency not included. Videologic promotional shots show the PCX2 running with translucent objects, but this was definitely not the case.

Again we were working to a silicon size budget. Going from 0.5micron in PCX1 to 0.35micron for PCX2 gave us more gates but still not enough to add all the features we wanted too.

Onto the PowerVR 2nd generation, how does it compare to the Voodoo 2 in terms of speed.

All the second generation 3D cores are essentially the same. We have said that we expect 4 million poly's per second from the chip (Voodoo II claims 3 million) and >120mpixels fill rate (Voodoo II claims 90mpixels) The real fact of the matter is that with a 333Mhz PII we are unlikely to see much more than 1M Polygons/sec generated on the CPU, so most high performance 3D rendering chips are going to be CPU limited this year.

How does a PVR 2nd gen compare to a Voodoo 2 in terms of image quality.

All second generation chips have the same 3D image quality feature set, the areas where we believe we will excel will be full 24 bit shading, bump mapping, texture compression and full scene super sampling.

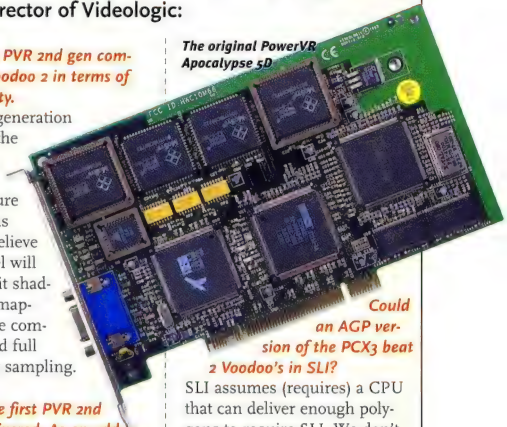
How will the first PVR 2nd gen's be delivered. As an add-in card, or on board with a 2D controller.

The first Power VR 2nd gen chip will be the combined 2D/3D part. This will allow add-in board companies to product both AGP and PCI boards in the $100 retail area and we expect to see these in the summer.

What one feature of the PCX3 do you think is substantially better then the Voodoo 2? That is to say, what is one of the cards greatest assets.

Again we're not focusing on the 3D only part. All Power VR 2nd gen parts are 3D feature set compatible. The outstanding benefit over the Voodoo 2 is it's price/performance. All Power VR 2nd gen chips will be single chips (Voodoo II is 4 chips) and the price will be similar to the existing PCX2.

How does the PVR 2nd gen plan to take on Voodoo 2's SLI mode.



The original PowerVR Apocalypse 5D

Could an AGP version of the PCX3 beat 2 Voodoo's in SLI?

SLI assumes (requires) a CPU that can deliver enough polygons to require SLI. We don't believe this will be an issue with Power VR 2nd gen for some time to come. There is really no need for two chips to be used in parallel as one already has far more rendering performance than CPU's can use for the foreseeable future.

Why would a user buy the PCX3 over a Voodoo 2?

Price performance, boards are likely to be $100 US (for PVR) vs $200 US (for Voodoo II)

Is the PVR 2nd gen fully backward compatible with Power SGL applications?

Yes

What about compatibility with Direct X applications?

We are fully committed to supporting Direct X 6.0.

Finally, where do you see the future of the PCX range going?

Higher performance, lower cost and greater image quality.

Quick Bytes

Everquest

So far everyone has been talking about Everquest in terms of it's mega-player ability and the fact that it's taking on UO. Well, take a look at the screenshots littered around Tech News to see that Everquest also has a lot of appeal in the area of total player immersion. Graphically these are some of the best textured polygons a 3D accelerator has ever seen.

Return Fire II

Return Fire II is the sequel to game Return Fire from Silent Software/Prolific Publishing and allows gamers to play a lethal game of "capture the flag," conducting pitched battles on 50 massive, real-time 3-D rendered maps.

Wargames

Here is a recent screenshot that displays the ongoing development of WarGames: Defcon 1. News in is that this full 3D real-time strategy game is just about ready and will ship just after June.

Sonic Storm Ok After All

Well, it seems that I must have had a faulty board for review before when I discussed the Videologic Sonic range of cards. The first thing I want to make clear though is that I had an Apocalypse 5D Sonic which exhibited the noise problem I commented on. Anyway, after Videologic read the review they contacted us and explained that they hadn't experienced the problems we reported and promptly went about sending out a new Sonic Storm to test.

The Sonic Storm that I received exhibited exceptional audio quality and did live up to Videologic's reputation. Firstly, the sound was crystal clear with no distortion or noise when silent, and the sound quality when playing wave based audio was incredibly good. The card also exhibited a more powerful bass range. To further the testing I played a series of MP3 files ranging in quality from 96Kbs to 128 Kbs, in which they all sounded extremely good.

LETTER:

Maximum 3Dfx performance

Q I have a few questions about my 3Dfx. My system is an Intel P200 MMX, 32 meg of RAM, S3 VIRGE (2 Mb) and a Diamond Monster 3D.

1. When I play games like Quake 2 on my 3dfx, the game will stop for about 1 second and then starts going again, this happens when I go around a corner or go outside, but when I'm going around corners inside, it's fine. Is there a way to permanently turn off the Z buffer?

2. Can I configure my system so my Monster 3D is always getting used, instead of only being used for 3Dfx games, this does not mean the special features?

3. When I go to the refresh rate, it only gives me one choice, like if I went 640x480 I will only be able to pick 60 Hz. Is there any way I can fix this?

Andre
Melbourne, Vic

A Good, good questions. Especially question 1, which is most interesting and probably quite pertinent to many people. The answer actually has everything to do with idsoftware and not 3Dfx.

1. Anyone who had played GL Quake, and in particular used a 3rd party BSP with it would have realised that while everything inside was ultra smooth, going outside was your worst ever nightmare. Considerably slower then playing the game in software mode. The answer lies within the way that ID create their dynamic 3D environments.

Unlike a flight sim which has a lot of I area, a landscape and a few buildings, a city or building environment is a much more complex affair. To create this environment, id have to create specific programming algorithms to render this complex 3D so dynamically. Due to the nature of the level design, these algorithms are optimised for inside areas. Going outside, which dramatically changes the way the scene is rendered causes a form of performance degradation. Id are programming gods, but in this situation, the degradation you see is from their code.

As for permanently disabling the Z-Buffer, trust me, you don't want to do that!

2. Hopefully here you're referring to "always being used" as meaning every game. The answer, bluntly, is NO. A 3Dfx will work with its own native games plus all Direct3D and OpenGL compatible games. Getting Direct3D functionality is as easy as installing DirectX (included on all our Cover CD's). Considering that almost every 3D game released recently has included a form of 3D support (i.e. Direct 3D or OpenGL) you're as close as "every game" is going to get.

3. Hey Andre, with this problem you're actually in the same boat that Ed Ben Mansill was. As a happy Diamond Monster 3D owner, when we told him that a performance increase could be had by changing the refresh rate he did cartwheels all the way to his PC, only to find the same 60Hz-only setting in the Monster 3D panel. Best suggestion: Go to Diamond's home page (www.diamondmm.com) and look for new drivers or download the 3Dfx reference drivers and see how they go.

HOTAS: Hands on Throttle and Stick

True synergy can exist between you, your PC and the game; provided you have the correct peripherals. By Maj. Ian Lindgren

The problem: Only 2 hands

At some stage we all get our first PC, and before long some of us get a burning desire to fly flight simulations. Off we go, one hand on the cheap joystick and the other pressing somewhere between 1 and 30 keys to perform all the basic functions like throttle up, gear down etc. The gameplay becomes difficult as you move into the serious combat flight sims like Longbow 2 and Jane's F15 where all 101 keys are used, and often more in combination with ALT and Shift keys.

The solution: HOTAS

Soon you realise that as you are engaged by a SAM, you can't drop chaff and flares, jink left, change to HARM missiles, target the SAM launcher, launch, change to Cluster Munitions, ground radar on, pickle, release, ground radar off then hit the burners while looking for the waypoint egress caret without playing Twister on the keyboard while forever referring to your game's keyboard reference chart! HOTAS is the solution!

HOTAS places all combat functions on the throttle and stick leaving the pilot to concentrate solely on the monitor during combat, never removing hands from throttle and stick. Together with HOTAS, you keep the aircraft within the envelope and always on the offensive, and only look at keyboard chart functions between combat.

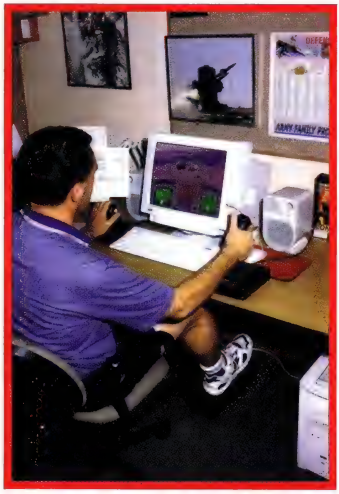
To program a HOTAS stick or throttle you simply hold the throttle or joystick button down, press the keyboard key and presto it's programmed either in the stick's on-board memory or via an application. Modern products allow you to program up to 50 odd keystrokes into a combination throttle and stick, and joystick witches hats allow you to pan around the cockpit without punching function keys. All you have to do is remember which button is which action, something you soon do! Helicopter sims also benefit from rudder peddles which increase your rate of turn in flight, and in a hover allow you to change heading while maintaining the ability to react instantly.

Do you like it hard or soft?

Like anything there are low cost and high cost products. A stick with hard springs like a Thrustmaster X Fighter is great for aircraft sims because it centres easily, but it's bad for helo sims because you get a cramp always pushing forward against the springs. A softer stick like one of the Suncom F-15 range is much better for helos.

You've also got to consider compatibility. A Suncom stick works best with a Suncom throttle, the same can be said of a Thrustmaster stick, throttle and rudders. Start mixing them up and results are not always good. I do not recommend buying a joystick with a thumb hat/castle switch to act as a rudder or throttle as a cheap alternative. There is no way your thumb can hit the change weapons button while turning the rudder and/or controlling the throttle unless you have two thumbs on one hand.

Ask not what you can do for your computer; ask instead what your computer and its peripherals can do for you!



The whole idea is to never have to touch the keyboard. The result: total control

A good starting kit is the Thrustmaster Combat Gear Bundle for $290. This includes the Attack Throttle, Top Gun joystick and iF22. With the average PC costing around $3000, this outlay represents less than 10% additional cost. Add the Elite Rudders for $270 and you've got the lot! The return on investment in terms of enjoyment that these products give is high; they are more often than not the difference between success and failure.

Two New Thrustmaster Controllers

ThrustMaster has replaced the WCS II Throttle and RCS Rudders with lower cost alternatives the Attack Throttle at $210, and Elite Rudders at $270. The Elite Rudders are more compact in design, and take up less room without loosing that typical Thrustmaster functionality. They continue to be the best rudders on the market and are very sturdy, but they are now made totally of a rigid plastic material that concerns me a little.

The Attack Throttle is a different design than the very military WCS II. Thrustmaster claim that it's based on an F15 throttle. Who are they kidding! Nonetheless, if you forgive that little error, the Attack Throttle is a great leap forward from the WCS II. Its primary benefit is that it converts all analogue input from any joystick or rudder into digital signal. No more drift or calibration problems!

The next benefit this digital technology brings is associated with the ThrustMapper application that will program up to three functions for every button on both stick and throttle. If you take the four buttons on the front of the throttle and the four buttons on a standard Thrustmaster stick, this gives 24 functions plus an additional forward and back function on the throttle side button. Thrustmaster claim that up to 36 functions can be programmed through the Throttle and ThrustMapper if the connected joystick has more than four buttons.

On the downside, the throttle is has virtually no movement resistance and this makes it easy to push into the Afterburner detent. I also find that the buttons are not in natural finger positions and this is awkward, but useable. Overall, I rate the Attack Throttle as great value for beginners and the Elite Rudders; well, nothing compares to their quality.

Suncom Strike Fighter Throttle & F-15E Raptor Joystick

Maj. Ian Lindgren

I'll be upfront with this one. Thrustmaster has competition here with the Strike Fighter Throttle. It's good, and it will be fantastic, so long as it gets software support.

First lets look at the F-15 series of Joysticks. There are three models, the Hawk which is a cheapy for the kids, the Raptor at $109 basically emulates a Thrustmaster FCS with four buttons and a witches hat. The Talon at $135 represents best value with 48 programmable key functions. I'll concentrate on the Raptor and Talon. I like the look of them (I know my peers at PCPowerPlay think they're ugly, but I'm an individual!)

Cheap but mostly nice

Both feel good in the hand, have smooth flowing easy centring springs, but there is a distinct lack of weight in the base that often allows them to fall over during dogfights, therefore, stick them to the table! The witches hat feels cheap and so too does the castle switch in the centre. If you like The F15 range, the Talon is the one to go for. It plugs straight into the Strike Fighter Throttle, whereas the Raptor requires a DIN to PS/2 keyboard conversion plug. Neither is as sturdy as their Thrustmaster competitors, but if you like the Strike Fighter Throttle below, stick with Suncom all the way.

The split-throttle is innovative, different & useless

The mother of all throttles

The Strike Fighter Throttle is the "mother" of all throttles. "Where is the rest of the aircraft?" I asked as I unpacked it! It's made of tough plastic and metal and bristles with switches, hats, buttons and LEDs. Believe me it feels like the real thing with firm detents for minimum/maximum throttle and afterburner, and a throttle tension lever. Four suction cups keep it firmly on the desk.

Its unique feature is that it is a dual throttle design. This is a little ahead of its time and is meant to give you control over two engines. Suncom advise that Activision's Fighter Squadron intend to include support, and that Jane's are considering a patch for F15. Nice concept, and I think it will work. It will be nice to run up both engines or have the ability to re-light individually on flame out.

This brilliant idea is also a pitfall until software support becomes available for the second throttle, because the second throttle takes the fourth joystick axis thereby ruling out use of foot rudders. You can use the second throttle as a rudder, but that it awkward. Suncom need to develop a software solution for this because piston engined aircraft require a rudder.

Programming ease

It is the most realistic feeling throttle I have used. I set it up using three joystick axes (no rudder function) and F15 and Top Gun flew brilliantly. My 13 year old son thinks it's the best! Its 16 programmable buttons and two 4 way hats combined with the 48 programmable functions of the Talon more than enough HOTAS capability. It really feels the part and swings forward with grace as you light the fire. Programming was slick, press the throttle program switch, hold down the throttle button to be programmed, type on your keyboard whatever you want the throttle button to do, and release the now programmed throttle button. Easy!

My main gripes are lack of documentation; it all comes on disk with no autoplay function and is confusing. Suncom promise to improve this, they must! The throttle also must develop the capability to use foot rudders or it will miss half the market.

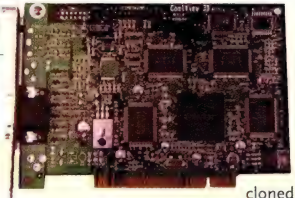
Suncom products are imported and distributed by TYRELL Distributors, phone ***(08) 9361 6081***, email jade@tyrelldistributors.com, fax ***(08) 9355 1905*** and website http://www.tyrelldistributors.com. At $275 go for it if you don't use rudders.

CoolView 3D

The Samsung RIVA

A top-quality product from a name you can trust

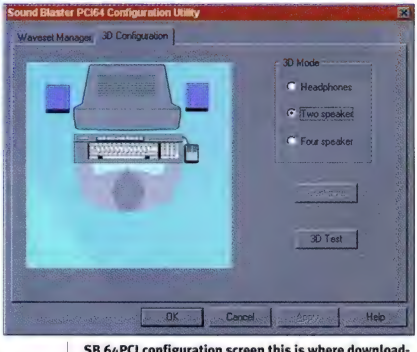
The Nvidia RIVA graphics chipset has proven itself to be the superior 2D/3D combo card solution. With the latest drivers, RIVA runs faster than the original 3Dfx and looks considerably better too. We still recommend, strongly and absolutely, that you use a 3Dfx card, but also that you couple it with the best Direct3D combo solution - and that's, without a doubt, the RIVA. We were recently sent a 'CoolView 3D for testing. This being about the 10,000th RIVA we've been through, caused little excitement. In effect, the hardware for all RIVA cards is identical (and really, all cloned chipset-based cards, like 3Dfx, Permedia, PowerVR etc). What lifts and separates is the software, drivers and support. It's here that we became aware that the CoolView simply has it all. It's distributed locally by Samsung, who stand behind the card fully.



Installing the Coolview was effortless. We'd never heard of the company that manufactures the card - Dooin Electronics, and were expecting the usual cheap job. Many smaller hardware companies simply reproduce the reference board design and reference drivers as supplied by the chip maker. Dooin have clearly re-worked both to ensure this RIVA stands out from the rest. Worthy of mention too is the documentation, which is easily the best we've ever seen for a video card. The instructions are clear and the manual is beautifully designed. A rarity. The CoolView retails for $285, which is a most excellent price for a fully featured RIVA.

Sound Blaster 64 PCI

Among the last to introduce a PCI sound card, Creative have one of the best.



SB 64PCI configuration screen this is where downloadable font sets are controlled and 3D parameters setup.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

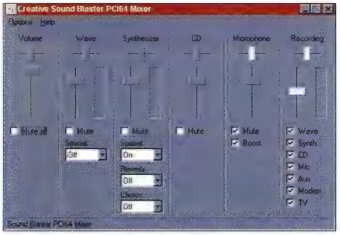
RRP	$249.00
Sound chip	Ensoniq ES1370 AudioPCI
Voices	64
MIDI channels	16
Downloadable samples	Yes
3D sound capable	DirectSound3D
On board RAM	2, 4 and 8MB RAM (uses system RAM)
Sample rate	8,16bit @ 5 - 48KHz (user selectable)
Total Harmonic Distortion	Not Provided
Signal to noise ratio	90dB

The first thing that you notice about this card is the fact that it has Ensoniq written on the PCB. What! Isn't this card a Creative Sound Blaster? Yes, it seems Creative's low-cost sound card is in fact the Ensoniq AudioPCI card. What does all this mean? We actually reviewed the Ensoniq AudioPCI a few issues back and were quite impressed with it.

The sound output from this re-badged card is no different, very crisp and relatively noise free. The most interesting thing about this card and the Ensoniq AudioPCI is the fact that they use system RAM to store samples. I said this about the Ensoniq AudioPCI and I will say it about this card: The use of on board system RAM for sample storage is a very good idea. This will mean that the SB 64PCI will be priced very attractively. What you get with the SB 64PCI card is Creative's own Sound Blaster drivers and utilities, which while not providing the same features as an SB AWE64, will suit most gamers needs.

I actually was very surprised that Creative would release a card that has Ensoniq on the PCB, but it seems Creative now has interests in Ensoniq so who really cares. The bottom line is if you are in need of a good sound card at the right price then look no further than this card. The card itself had no trouble with any game I throw at it, even old DOS based games like Wolfenstein 3D (what, don't you still have a copy stashed somewhere?). The Ensoniq AudioPCI received a good score in our previous tests, now with the Sound Blaster brand stamped on it you'd be a fool not to get one. Professional musicians should look at Creative's higher end cards for their satisfaction though. If you are in the market for a good sound card with 3D support then this is the card for you.

Garry Wallis



Sound Blaster 64PCI version of Creative's well known mixing utility.

Sound Quality	90%
PCB Design	85%
Ease of installation	98%
Game support	92%
OVERALL RANKING	**91.25%**

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VIRTUAL REALITY
What went wrong

Movies have been made about it and the press seemed to be forever going on about and it. It was to become the key component in the future of computing. But it's not! Something has gone badly wrong. Jere Lawrence looks at what happened and investigates if there's any hope for the future of this once exciting technology.

Virtual Reality was something I really wanted to see work. It seemed to offer so much, gaming in your own environment, the ability to remove the entire world from your playing experience and most importantly, the promise of in your face full screen gaming. No more was that 14" monitor going to destroy the immersive experience we all craved.

What went wrong then, is an interesting question to examine, because although it can't be denied that some elements of VR were a let down, other factors pushing technology way too fast meant that VR didn't necessarily go right.

The problems with VR Headsets

The image

The first and primary problem that a VR solution faced was that it looked terrible. VR Headsets would be fitted out with 2 LCD displays, both with a maximum resolution of 181 x 470 Pixels. Not trying to sound too negative, but that's just pitiful! What's worse though, is in the case of the Forte VFX 1, they use a VESA feature connector that will only allow for 8 bit colour to be sent to the headset. Considering that these days we're used to playing games at 640 x 480 in 24 bit colour - some of us at 800 x 600, putting on a VR headset with such substantial image degradation is the last thing you'd want to do.

The image problems didn't just stop at the resolution of the LCD screen though. One of the other major complaints about the headsets was that the image was often fuzzy, blurry and out of focus making it hard to read HUDs or even to identify other targeted units in the game. A "Virtual Reality" device that makes something seem less realistic is all rather self defeating.

In my opinion though, the greatest image limitation of the VR headsets was in how they presented the image to the user. Anyone who had tried the arcade based VR would know that those helmets gave you full peripheral vision (the ability to see the display right to the corners of your eyes). The home VR headset however does not allow for this. What it ended up looking like was a portable LCD colour TV jammed up in your face, a damn blurry one at that.

Forte's original VFX1 sold locally for around $1500

Fatigue

The next problem to hit VR and it's users was one concerning fatigue generated by the device. I will concede that it is "virtual reality" (reality can be fatiguing), but this was definitely a factor in the fall of VR. Let's face it, a lot of us have been pretty lazy with our PCs. You only have to sit there looking at the screen and making small physical movements to generate in-game mobility.

With VR however, particularly with head tracking, navigating a scene involves the use of a lot of muscles. With the added weight of the helmet, particularly in the area of the neck it can start to hurt. Add to that the real factor of eye strain with the potential of headaches and you have a device that can only be used in small doses. Forte even suggest taking

Yes kids! You too can look this cool

a break every 15 minutes (actually written in their documentation). Every 15 minutes!! Like we play our games in such small doses!

To be fair though, this is a criticism that can't be negated by any manufacturer, nor is it their fault. Want to experience this factor of VR? Sit up straight in your chair and imagine you're in a jet fighter. Now, check your 6 using your head. Do this repeatedly. Note the lovely feeling you get in your neck? Reality bites.

Technology killed the Virtual Reality Star

Ultimately though it's potentially 3D accelerators that killed Virtual Reality. With the onset of 3D accelerators came games that looked superior to everything we've ever seen in a higher resolution and with more colours. Why then would you want to ever use that VR thing sitting next to you with its tiny resolution and only 256 colours. Add to that the fact that 3D accelerators were the hot selling item and developers were more interested (rightly so) in developing for 3D accelerators then they were in adding any form of support for VR Headsets in their games.

VR - The future

So, does VR have a future. The answer is maybe. Although nothing can be done about the physical requirements of VR (used muscles do become stronger and after a while it won't hurt), something can be done in the realms of the display. Forte who is about the only remaining Virtual Realty Headset manufacturer around and are working on a headset called the VFX 3D.

The VFX 3D will be the same as their previous product (LCD resolution limitations and all) but will allow the headset to be plugged directly into your 15 pin VGA port. It will offer a maximum resolution of 640x480x16.7million colors and a maximum refresh rate of 72Hz.

What this ultimately allows for is a merging of 3D accelerator technology with a VR headset. If Forte can also release a programming API for the Real 3D abilities of the Headset, or a release of Direct X ships with a Headset 3D API then this little beauty would potentially (we'd have to see it to actually comment on it) offer accelerated Real Time 3D within the headset environment.

Even without API support it still opens up the Headset market to allow for a greater variety of games to utilise it. Let's face it, even after citing all the negatives that I have, head tracking sounds pretty cool. Maybe not as much in a flight sim because of all the twisting and turning, but imagine say Quake 2 or Heavy Gear where there is a greater emphasis on forward facing natural human movements.

Only time will tell if VR Headsets will ever make a comeback, I personally hope they do, especially with the incorporation of peripheral vision. To just think how good VR could be. Remember when you were playing Tomb Raider for the first time and the T-Rex came thumping around the corner at you. Now imagine it inside a VR visor! It would be a total change of undies moment, and worth every second.

BENCHTESTED:
Six Pentium II Motherboards

Peak game performance comes from using the best equipment. It all starts with the motherboard, and as we discover, all are not equal...

A mainboard's speed is certainly paramount, but other factors are also important. Mainboards that support features like software CPU and clock frequency setup through the BIOS are great for novice users and speed freaks alike. What we did to test these babies was to individually run each mainboard through a bunch of different benchmarks. Check out the side bar to see which benchmarks we used.

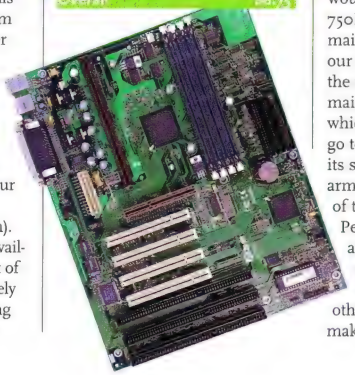
AOpen AX6L

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	ATX
Board Size	305mm x 244mm
System Bus Speeds	66, 68.5, 75, 83.3MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	1.5x - 8.0x
System memory	EDO and SDRAM 3.3v - 4 DIMM Slots
Sys.Memory supported	1GB
Chipset	Intel 82440LX
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI, 1 x AGP
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse, IrDA
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	Suspend to hard drive, Modem card wake up Over current protection, CPU thermal protection Fan monitoring, System Voltage monitoring
Supplier	Servex Australia Limited 02 9870 1999 (www.servex.com.au)
Cost (RRP)	$180.00

This board scored quite well in most of the benchmarks. Overall it is a nice mainboard with some very cool features especially its jumperless design. This allows you to set up your system bus speeds and clock multiplier settings through the BIOS setup program. This board allows for a massive 8.0 x clock multiplier to be used, that's pretty quick even at 66MHz. But at 83.3MHz and with an 8.0 clock multiplier your CPU would be running at 666.4MHz (a devil of a system). There is no Pentium II CPU available that could handle that sort of speed... Yet. Overall an extremely nice mainboard for overclocking speed freaks and novices alike.

Mainboard design	80
Speed	87
Features	90
Overclockability	98
Overall	88.75



AOpen AX6LC

PC PowerPlay ULTIMATE HARDWARE

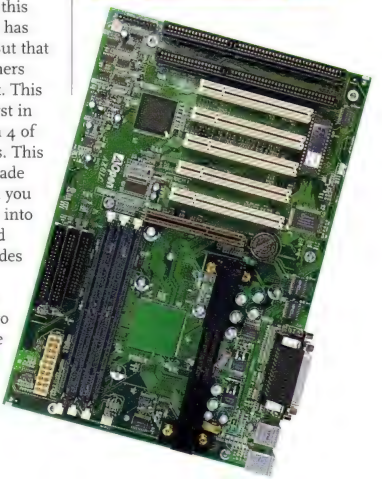
SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	ATX
Board Size	305mm x 202mm
System Bus Speeds	66, 68.5, 75, 83.3MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	1.5x - 8.0x
System memory	EDO and SDRAM 3.3v - 3 DIMM Slots
Sys.Memory Supported	750MB
Chipset	Intel 82440LX
Expansion Slots	2 x ISA, 5 x PCI, 1 x AGP
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	Suspend to hard drive, Modem card wake up Over current protection, CPU thermal protection Fan monitoring, System Voltage monitoring SB-LINK connector
Supplier	Servex Australia Limited 02 9870 1999 (www.servex.com.au)
Cost (RRP)	$175.00

Like its bigger brother the AX6LC mainboard has a great feature set. It also inherited its amazing overclocking abilities. What is great about this mainboard is that it provides 5 PCI slots Yeaahhh!

Now there's only two slow ISA slots showing their ugly faces. The only downfall is that this version of the mainboard has only three DIMM slots. But that wouldn't worry most gamers 750MB is ample for most. This mainboard also placed first in our benchmark tests with 4 of the top scores in our tests. This mainboard is very well made which is confirmed when you go to insert the processor into its slot. Specially designed arms fold out from the sides of the slot to hold the Pentium II CPU firmly and without the need to mess with the strange rig arrangement other manufactures make you go through. This mainboard thoroughly deserves the Hot Hardware seal of approval.

Mainboard design	92
Speed	95
Features	92
Overclockability	96
Overall	93.75



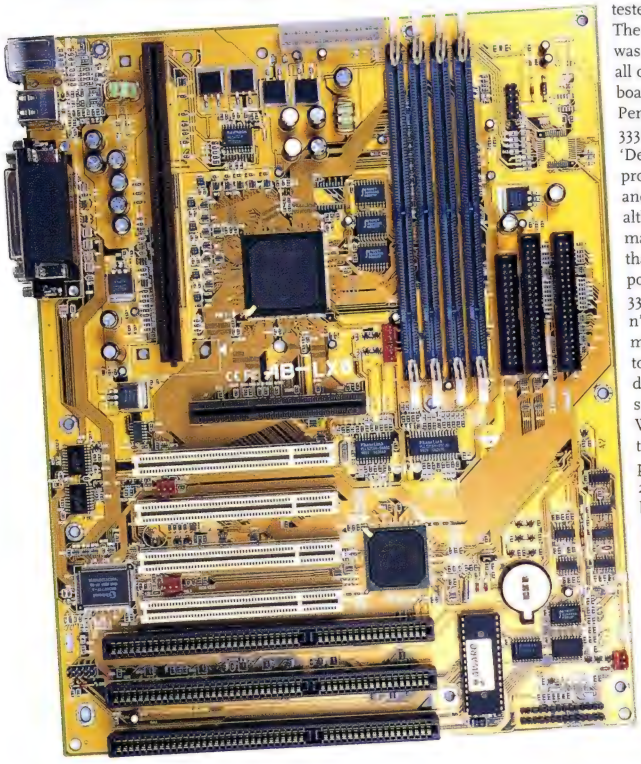
Abit LX6

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	ATX
Board Size	305mm x 245mm
System Bus Speeds	66, 75, 83.3MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	2.0x - 5.5x
System memory	EDO and SDRAM - 4 DIMM Slots
Sys.Memory Supported	1GB EDO, 512MB SDRAM
Chipset	Intel 82440LX
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI, 1 x AGP
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	Modem card wake up, CPU thermal protection
Supplier	Integral 039 5804088 (www.integralcomputers.com.au)
Cost (RRP)	TBA

This mainboard is fast don't get me wrong this old speed champion from Abit still holds it's own with the new crowd. But it is starting to show its age slightly against some of these newer boards. The LX6 shows us how good Abit are at creating high performance mainboards. The manual supplied with the LX6 is one of the best in the bunch offering clear concise information about every aspect of this mainboard. This mainboard also supports jumperless operation and would be perfect for any new user wanting to invest in a high performance mainboard.

Mainboard design	90
Speed	92
Features	89
Overclockability	90
Overall	90.25

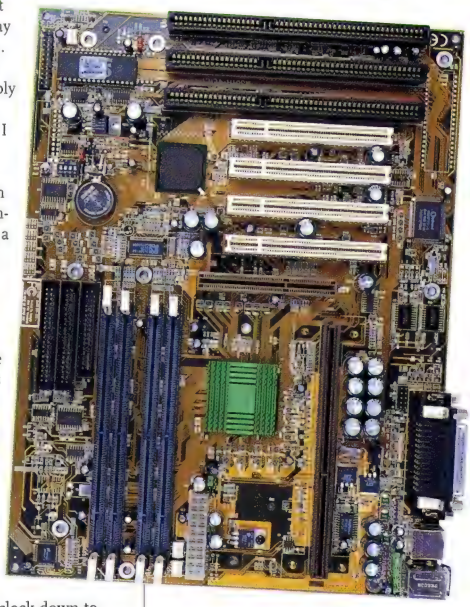


Microstar International MSI-6111

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	ATX
Board Size	300mm x 230mm
System Bus Speeds	66MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	3.5x - 5.0x
System memory	EDO and SDRAM - 4 DIMM Slots
Sys.Memory Supported	1GB EDO, 512MB SDRAM
Chipset	Intel 82440LX
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI, 1 x AGP
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AMI BIOS
Other Features	On-Board system hardware monitor, system voltage detection, CPU overheat warning, chassis Intrusion detect.
Supplier	Mystar Computers, (02) 9868 6962, www.mystar.com.au

Well what can I say except... bummer. This mainboard simply refused to run with the CPU I tested with. The testing was done with all other mainboards using a Pentium II 333MHz 'Deschute' processor and although the manual says that it supports the 333 I couldn't get the mainboard to run at a descent speed. When I turned to processor clock down to 233MHz the mainboard booted but seemed to be running extremely slow. My guess is that because the mainboard didn't recognise the CPU, it disabled the Level 2 cache. At the 333MHz the system refused to start at all. To the credit of Microstar International there is a BIOS upgrade that fixes this but I wanted to test each mainboard as they are shipped. Due to time constraints I was unable to complete the benchmark tests, which will have to wait for next issue.



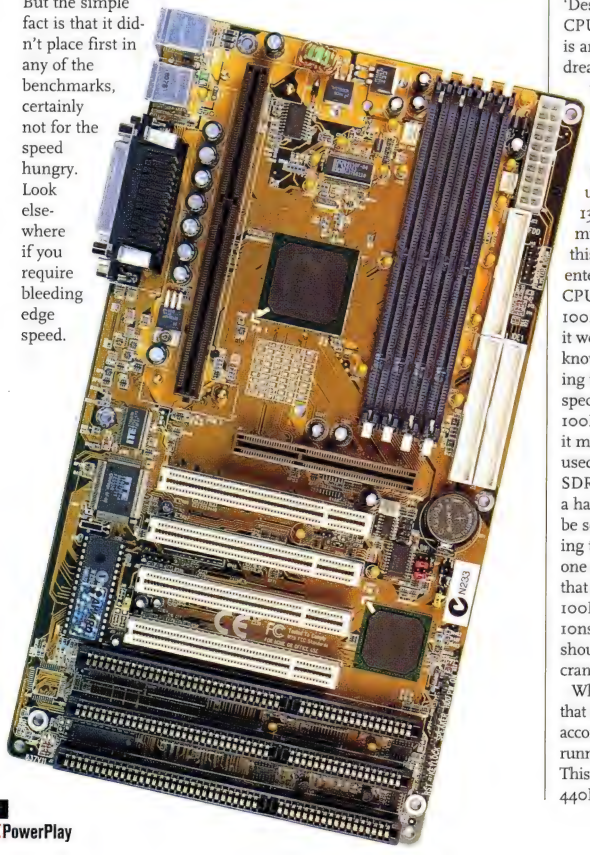
Shuttle HOT-637/P

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	ATX
Board Size	305mm x 170mm
System Bus Speeds	50, 60, 66, 75, 83MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	2.0x - 5.5x
System memory	EDO and SDRAM - 4 DIMM Slots
Sys.Memory Supported	512MB
Chipset	Intel 82440LX
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI, 1 x AGP
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	Temperature monitoring and alert, Voltage monitoring, Fan status monitoring
Supplier	Integral 039 5804088 (www.integralcomputers.com.au)
Cost (RRP)	TBA

I was quite impressed with this mainboard mainly due to its compact footprint. The actual board itself didn't perform that badly in the benchmarks receiving reasonable scores in all tests. But the simple fact is that it didn't place first in any of the benchmarks, certainly not for the speed hungry. Look elsewhere if you require bleeding edge speed.

Mainboard design	88
Speed	86
Features	90
Overclockability	90
Overall	88.5

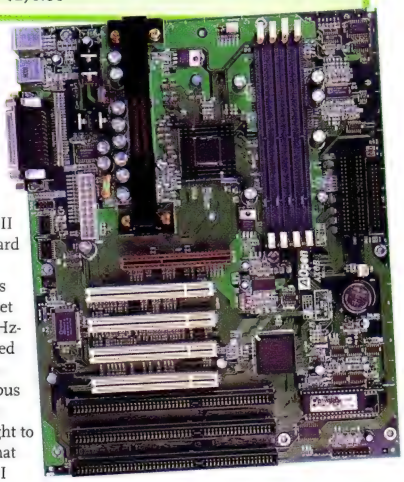


AOpen AX6B

PC PowerPlay ULTIMATE HARD WARE

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	ATX
Board Size	305mm x 244mm
System Bus Speeds	66, 68.5, 75, 83.3, 100, 103, 112, 133.3MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	1.5x - 8.0x
System memory	SDRAM or Registered SDRAM - 4 DIMM Slots
Sys.Memory Supported	1GB
Chipset	Intel 82440BX
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI, 1 x AGP
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	Suspend to Hard Drive, Over-current protection CPU Thermal Protection, Fan Monitoring System Voltage monitoring
Supplier	Servex Australia Limited 02 9870 1999 (www.servex.com.au)
Price	$270.00



This mainboard was a very nice surprise a BX among the LX crowd. The first time I tried this mainboard was with a 333MHz 'Deschute' Pentium II CPU. Wow! This board is an overclockers dream. Not only does the 440BX chipset provide 100MHz-system bus speed operation it also take the system bus up to a ridiculous 133.3MHz! I thought to myself, let's see what this baby can do so I entered the BIOS and set the CPU to 4.0 x clock multiplier and 100MHz system bus speed and... it worked without a problem! I know some people have been saying that you will need PC-100 specification RAM to use the 100MHz bus speeds, I even said it myself. The RAM I actually used was standard Pentium II SDRAM (TI 10ns) brought from a hardware wholesaler. That may be so, but please don't come crying to me if you rush out and buy one of these boards only to find that your RAM doesn't work at 100MHz. SDRAM marked with a 10ns (nano seconds) access time should be able to get your system cranking at 100MHz bus speed.

What is also very interesting is that this mainboard can still accommodate older Pentium II running at a bus speed of 66MHz. This means you could get a 440BX board and use your old Pentium II until you can afford the upgrade to a 350 or a 400MHz Pentium II beast.

As you can see from the benchmarks, when running at 66MHz bus speed this mainboard still holds its own against the optimised LX based boards. Remember that this mainboard is still in its first revision too. Definitely got to get one of these boards if you want the most overclockable mainboard out there. With its 133.3MHz system bus option and an 8.0x clock multiplier the max processor clock frequency is a massive 1066.4MHz! It should keep your processor upgrade needs covered for a while.

Mainboard design	93
Speed	94
Features	92
Overclockability	98
Overall	94.25

BENCHMARKS

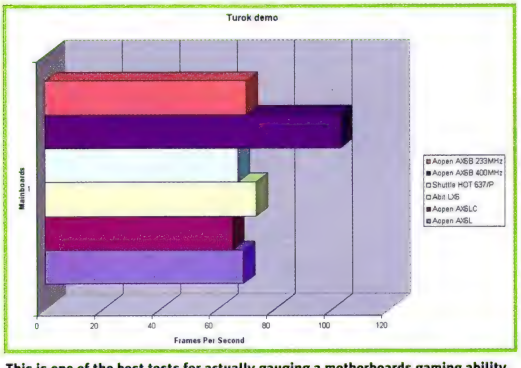
Motherboard Type	MDK	Norton	CPUMark32	FPU/Winmark	Final Reality	Turok demo
LX based						
Aopen AX6L	91*	114.4	606*	1200*	2.88 Reality marks	68.9 fps
Aopen AX6LC	91*	114.6*	606*	1200*	2.88 Reality marks	65.2 fps
MSI 6111	-	-	-	-	-	-
Abit LX6	91*	111.9	601	1200*	2.88 Reality marks	73.5 fps*
Shuttle HOT-637	84	112.2	603	1190	2.80 Reality marks	67.2 fps
BX Based						
Aopen AX6B (4x100)	150	194.7	1040	2060	3.93 Reality marks	102.8 fps
Aopen AX6B (233)	89	113	598	1200*	2.96 Reality marks*	70.1 fps

* indicates fastest performer in each benchmark

Okay so how did we test these mainboards, what did we use? Fair Benchmarking is a very difficult thing to achieve, that is why there is no definitive benchmark in the computer industry. That is also why every vendor seems to provide us with a barrage of different benchmark results. It certainly would be great if there was a benchmark to provide the answer that everything is judged by. But there isn't, so what we have to do is run a variety of benchmarks so that we can be sure that we have a more accurate answer.

We actually used six benchmarks, from a CPU test to actual frame rates in games. The first benchmark we ran was Shiny Entertainment's Win 95 MDK Perf Test. This basically tests Windows 95's DirectX performance and is given as a benchmark index where a 100 means the PC is as fast as a Pentium Pro 200MHz. The second test used was Norton Utilities benchmark it gives your PC performance as an index against the speed of a 386sx-16, which has an index of 1.0. The third and forth tests are part of Winbench 98 from Ziff-Davis. I choose CPUmark32 and FPU WinMark as these benchmarks single out the CPUs and the FPUs speed and provides a very good indication of raw number crunching power. The next test was the Final Reality benchmark, which tests 3D performance. The Final Reality benchmark provides a very good indication of how well the system performs 3D calculations and 2D image manipulation. The last test we performed was from an actual game. Turok: The Dinosaur Hunter. This is just a special demo release of Turok that allows for a command line parameter of -benchmark to be used when running TurokDemo.exe. When this parameter is used the demo runs through a variety of levels and at the end supplies you with an average frames per second reading. Mainboards that perform well in each of these benchmarks can be considered to be the fastest and are rewarded accordingly. We will add Quake II massive1.dm2 timedemo to the benchmark list for the next set of mainboards to come under the microscope.

SAMPLE TEST GRAPH:



This is one of the best tests for actually gauging a motherboards gaming ability. With all mainboards achieving a frame rate in the 60's. Abit shows its colours in this benchmark achieving the highest score, except for the 400 MHz of course. Which hit an insane 102.8 fps on a Diamond Monster 3D classic Voodoo board!

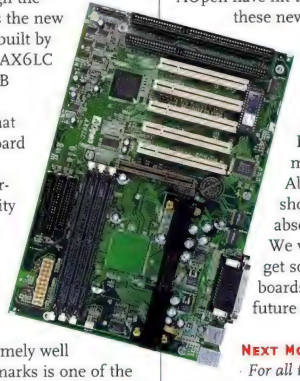
TEST MACHINE CONFIGURATION

Processor : Intel Pentium II 333MHz CPU
RAM : 1 x 32 MB SDRAM DIMM (TI 10ns)
Hard Drive : Fujitsu M1636TAU (1.6GB) Intel Bus master drivers used.
Video Card : Diamond Stealth 64 Video VRAM 4MB
3D Accelerator : Diamond Monster 3D (GRX clock set to 54MHz).
Sound Card: Sound Blaster 64PCI
CD-ROM : Diamond Data 12x ATAPI
OS: Windows 95 OSR2.1 with USB patch (build 1212)
DirectX 5.0
Glide 2.43
Diamond Monster 3D drivers 1.09
Diamond GT Turbo drivers

Note: Windows 95 and all software were re-loaded for each mainboard before testing

So, which one wins?

I must say now that all six of these mainboards are built to the highest quality standards. They all use high quality components but there is one that really shone through the rest, that was the new mainboards built by AOpen. The AX6LC and the AX6B mainboards showed us that good mainboard design and amazing overclocking ability prove to be too good to resist. The fact that these boards performed extremely well in all benchmarks is one of the reasons why they were awarded the PC PowerPlay Ultimate Hardware award. The fact that they were a dream to use and configure was also another strong selling point. If you just require a new LX based mainboard then the AOpen AX6LC is for you. If you want the added upgrade options that the BX chipset provides then go for the AOpen AX6B. It seems that AOpen have hit the spot with these new babies. It just waits to be seen what the other manufacturers can do with their BX chipset mainboards. Abit's BX board should be an absolute screamer. We will hopefully get some BX based boards for review in a future issue.



NEXT MONTH:

For all those people who want an alternative to slot 1, we have a set of socket 7 based TX and AMD based boards to put through their paces next month. Plus, all the dirt on overclocking as a quick, cheap and sometimes easy way to boost your system's power.

THE FUTURE OF THE NET

If I had a crystal ball I'd look into it and discover what sort of games we'd be playing and how we'd be playing them over the next couple of years.

Tell someone 5 years ago they'd be playing this online, they'd laugh. So what does the next 5 years promise?

Firstly, the net is going to continue on with this explosion its been going through over the next couple of years. Almost every TV ad these days has something web related (not necessarily a good thing) and it seems even the most mundane sort of corporations are hopping online to check out the benefits. Here's a few cold hard facts about numbers on the Net as the years go by: The number of host computers has doubled every year for a very long time. Ten years ago there were just 28,000 hosts on the Net, whereas now there is approximately 9 million. That's not exactly small in anyone's language. What are these computers actually doing? Servicing hundreds of thousands of websites, the number of which is also growing at a ridiculous rate and there is no telling where it will stop, or when. The traffic on the net is now standing at something like 30 trillion bytes per month. Or thirty thousand Gigabytes. This may not seen like much to someone who isn't connected, but in truth it's massive. In fact a little while ago Telstra almost quadrupled their bandwidth to the US from Australia, and it wasn't because people wanted to 'phone home'.

Too Cheap:

Hands up who was on the net four years ago? Hmm, not too many hands. It was just way too expensive for your average Joe and his dog to get on the Net. Nowdays its not exactly cheap, but it is at least accessible to just about everyone, whether it be from home, school, university, work or just the local library. The good news is that prices are only going to get cheaper. $5 an hour? Get real. Over the next couple of years we'll be seeing most people accessing the net for $1 an hour or below, with no catches like download limits or anything like that. Competition is a marvellous thing and it only drives prices one way. In the case of the Net they have been plummeting, so if you aren't on the net take another look now, and perhaps in a few months time that budget of yours might just allow for it.

Too fast:

As you would have read in the April issue there is now only one 56K modem standard. This opens up the way for you and your ISPs to upgrade without any worry of being left in the technological backwaters. 56K opens up quite a lot of opportunities for us gamers, the main one being reduced lag, next probably being faster downloads. But 56K modems are only the tip of the iceberg. Cable modems are now becoming easier to

C&C 2: Tiberium Sun, which just goes to show that while the internet might be evolving quickly, the RTS scene is set firmly in the slow lane

obtain for the average household, they aren't in the "cool I just got my dole cheque, hey maybe I got enough for cable modem access" just yet, but prices are coming down and down. It shouldn't be too long before we see ultra fast speeds, and we do mean ultra fast (we're talking as fast as a LAN here) become widely available. A global LAN (pick the oxymoron) is something too good to think about.

But what about the Games?

Ahh yes the games. Well gaming is going to get better and better. Firstly, because the net will be cheaper, more people will be able to play games on it, and since it will be faster, the games will be more even, ultimately more playable and of higher quality. Games won't just 'feature' multiplayer capabilities any more, but they will actually be totally devoted to playing online. This isn't saying that there won't be any single player games around because there will be (and good ones too) but there will be a general rift between the two, less and less games will feature both good single and good multiplayer aspects. This might seem like a new concept but it's not really - have you ever tried to play chess by your self? Or Euchre? Or even eye spy with my little eye? Multiplayer 'games' have been around since the dawn of time and whether you think this is a good thing or not they are coming to the PC in droves. X Wing vs TIE Fighter and Ultima Online are the two obvious games which are multiplayer oriented but there are many more on the way. Take Team Fortress II, a commercial product which is multiplayer only, a first for the 'Wolf 3D Clone' genre. Sole Survivor is another one and even though it sucks, and sucks quite hard it does show that companies are willing to put money behind something which at least tries to be new and interesting. So Westwood fouled up this time, I'm sure they'll use it as a learning experience for C&C2: Tiberian Sun - which is a game to be surely very heavily into Multiplayer, and so it should be too.

Gaming services will also become a big part of what we do on the Net, while they offer good services now, the cost can sometimes be a bit too much on top of ISP charges. We looked at Wireplay a few months back and thought it was way cool, but the price just didn't justify the benefits, even if it isn't net based. They have heard the call, and have now drastically dropped prices, and since they now have the likes of Quake and co as well, it makes Wireplay a definite possibility. Multiplay/TEN is also looking pretty damn good, and then you have the freebies: Westwood Online (previously known as Wchat), Battle.net and now the ultimately cool Activlink (see issue #24 for details).

What we're trying to get at is, if you're not on the net, you should be, if you're still living with your Mum and Dad tell them its for school or uni, if you're living by yourself find that extra thirty bucks or so it costs per month. Thirty bucks might seem like a fair bit to pay each month for someone who is a bit cash strapped, but hey if you go to the movies it costs you seven bucks and it only goes for two hours, is non interactive, and is nowhere near as much fun. Now is the time to get connected because if you don't you're going to get left behind in a big way. Dial an ISP now, log on, and lose yourself in an ever expanding amazing world, the world of Multiplayer gaming.

"It shouldn't be too long before we see ultra fast speeds, and we do mean ultra fast (we're talking as fast as a LAN here) become widely available. A global LAN ... is something too good to think about."

Next month:

With all these web pages around you might be thinking to yourself "Gee, I bet I could make a pretty damn cool web page if I knew how" So next month Webstalk will be devoted to just that, getting, setting up and making the coolest web page possible. It will be mainly for newbies but we'll try and put some stuff in there for HTML experts as well just to spice things up a little bit for the seasoned pros. We'll cover things like how to get your own Domain, the basics of HTML, how to make spiffy animated .gifs and other techy enhancements and bung everything which looks cool on the CD. Are we nice people or what?

THE FAR SITE

THIS MONTH'S INTERNET MUST-SEE SITES

LOOK READERS! NEW THING!

Welcome once again to the Far Site. Keep sending those addresses in at *spoonman@next.com.au* because the world needs YOU to let them know about all those legendary sites hiding at strange domain names, sites such as these ones:

ASK SATAN

http://www.crashsite.com/AskSatan.html

(sent by Daniel Radford)

Got a problem with your love life, keep on getting stepped on? No one to talk to? Ask Satan, he is someone to console with after that heart wrenching break up, someone to confide in. As you should have guessed by now, this site is devoted to people writing in their problems and having them solved by the evil one himself.

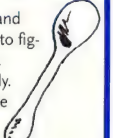
Probably one of the more frightening sites on the net, but only due to the fact that someone would have to be really sad to come up with such a concept. Ultimately good for a laugh though.

SITE DESIGN:

CONTENT:

THE SCORING SYSTEM

Ben told me it could be crazy and well it is a bit but it's not hard to figure out. It's out of five spoons. Pretty easy to understand, really. You'll probably notice that there will be a lot of fours and fives scored, this is because we only want to show you cool stuff and not waste space by telling you what to avoid.



QUAKE3.NET:

http://www.quake3.net

One of the first Quake3 sites, is there anything else you need to know? Probably not... What's that Ben, 700 words to a page? Ok, ok... While it doesn't contain all that much info on Quake3 just yet, I'm sure it will once there is actually some info available. Set out as you would expect from most other Quake sites which is adequate and is sure to be one of leading Q3 sites once info starts flowing, hence low content rating.

SITE DESIGN:

CONTENT:

SHOCKWAVE

http://www.macromedia.com/shcokwave

Shockwave is really cool. If you don't know it's a browser plugin which can play some ridiculously cool multimedia presentations through the net. Macromedia are the chums behind this masterpiece and they have a nice site to go along with it as well. The best part about the whole thing is that when you download Shockwave (or the new ShockRave) it automatically installs itself to your browser immediately. No messy .zips or anything. The actual site is well maintained and easy to navigate so it gets the thumbs up for design, and the content is well worth checking out as well. Adds another dimension to your surfing experiences.

SITE DESIGN:

CONTENT:

MR HAT'S HELLHOLE:

http://www.thehellhole.com

(Sent by Gavin King)

Ok, so it's another South Park site, but this one is so damn good it just isn't funny. Well actually it is funny, that's what's good about it. Hang on, I'm getting confused. This site contains loads of .wav files, you can even download full episodes. It's also got heaps of pictures, movies, games and lots, lots more. Designed well, there has been a lot of work

put into the icons and it shows. A pretty professional looking site who's main claim to fame being that they explain all the things Kenny says. Do we love this site? Yes we do.

SITE DESIGN:

CONTENT:

CAVEDOG:

http://www.cavedog.com

The official site would usually be the last place you'd go for a bit of news, but Cavedog have succeeded in actually creating a useful website. The best part of it being that it's where you go to download all those new units you keep hearing about, and secondly because it could actually provide some useful information. Never before has this happened before and it should happen a LOT more often. Are you listening developers? This site is an example of how it should be done. It's easy to navigate, looks good and provides information.

SITE DESIGN:

CONTENT:

TAMAGOTHI

http://www.gothic.net/~luvcraft/tamagothi/tamagothi.html

(Sent by Glen "FrenZon" Murphy)

Sick of those really annoying Japanese toys, get your own back with Tamagothi, your very own Gothic Tamagotchi. The little fella is so cute, your best gothic results will come when your Tamagothi is sleepy, irritated and on the verge of suicide. To accomplish this, you have to dose him up on speed and smack, as well as beat him, ignore him and turn the lights on when he's asleep for the extra grumpy effect. Do not try this on your other Tamagotchis...or your little brother for that matter. This site is imaginative, well presented and just plain fun. A non serious look at what slaves we are to marketing hype and advertising.

SITE DESIGN:

CONTENT:

Entrepreneur™

"THE MOST RUTHLESS STRATEGY GAME EVER"

THE GAME THAT HAS CREATED A NEW GAMES GENRE
"BUSINESS / CORPORATE WARFARE"

"IT'S FULL OF TREACHERY TRICKERY AND DECEIT. AND BOY IS IT FUN !" - FIONA GARROLL, AUSTRALIAN RESELLR NEWS.

"WANNA BE THE NEXT BILL GATES ?. HERE'S YOUR CHANCE ...
"DIRTY TRICKS ? YOU BET. THIS IS WAR, AFTER ALL "
- FEB 98 COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

"ENTREPRENEUR IS BOLD, FUN, UNIQUE, EXCITING AND THOROUGHLY ADDICTING" - COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

"ENTREPRENEUR IS THE BEST STRATEGY GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS YEAR !. THE AI IS NOTHING SHORT OF FANTASTIC !"
- GAMESPOT PLAYER REVIEW

"THE AI ISN'T JUST DAMN GOOD, IT'S A BASTARD !"
- GAMESPOT

"ENCOURAGES BASTARD-LIKE BEHAVIOUR"
- MARCH 98 PC POWERPLAY

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SETUP with Ashton Mills

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When you write, remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC. Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still, print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to your queries.

Setup
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick st.
Redfern
NSW 2016
setup@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

Which CPU?

Q I'm about to upgrade the old 486 to P200MMX, however the more questions I ask whether to have an Intel or IBM/Cyrix CPU the more confused I get. I am told that the IBM is quicker under Windows but I may have compatibility problems with games. Compatibility with games is very important to me!! Am told the Intel is a better CPU and will not have as many, if any, compatibility problems with games and other programs. Has the IBM technology caught up with Intel's?

The m/board I have chosen is Austek sp97-V with 512K cache with an onboard video which I will allocate 4MB RAM. The CD-ROM will be 24 spin and I will put in a 16 bit sound card, probably Sound Blaster 16. 64 MB EDO RAM will be installed.

As you can see I am not going overboard price-wise, however the price difference in the CPU's is only $45.00 thus price in regards the CPU is not an issue, just want to know which one I will have the least problems with.

Jason

A IBM was making chips long before Intel and, if you do a little research (try their web page), you'll find their technology and R&D is leaps and bounds above Intel's. The difference is that IBM invests across the board in all kinds of science and technological development. Intel makes PC chips and little else. Intel's share of the PC chip market is massive, but their stake in the world's IC (Integrated Circuit) industry is minimal.

But we're talking GAMES here, so which is best? Depends on what you want... For MMX and FPU (Floating Point Unit) performance the way to go is Intel. Games like Quake use the FPU quite a lot, so this is important. However as you've no doubt discovered, lower-MHz IBM chips can out perform faster Intel chips for raw CPU grunt, and at a cheaper price.

Personally I'd go for an IBM because it's cheaper and faster. And although its MMX implementation isn't as good - name a game you play that uses MMX and where you saw a difference between the MMX and non-MMX version? Yeah, it's not an issue. If you're worried, get the Intel. If price is more important, get an IBM.

Faulty Floppy

Q I own a Pentium 233 MMx with 32 meg of RAM, 1.1 gig hardidsk, 24xSpeed CDROM. This machine used to be a Pentium 75 but a few weekends ago a couple of friends and I decided to upgrade it. I did not wipe my hard drive or anything, just put in the new motherboard, CPU and CDROM. However when we put it all back together the 3.5 floppy drive was not working. By that I mean all that happens is that the light stays on and it can not read any disks. I have tried various methods of turning the cables around but the way it is set up is the only way the computer will boot up.

Please Help.

Ted Walton

A Funnily enough, floppies are the hardest thing to install when you upgrade a PC, precisely for this reason! It's easily fixed:

The floppy cable goes against all other cable conventions in your PC. Firstly, the 'red to pin 1' rule doesn't always apply - you'll have to experiment with the plug and try it in either in either way. Secondly there are only two plugs on your cable, and unlike other cables in your machine, the plugs here designate drive A: and B:. If your BIOS is looking for a drive A: and you've got a drive B: connected, it isn't going to work.

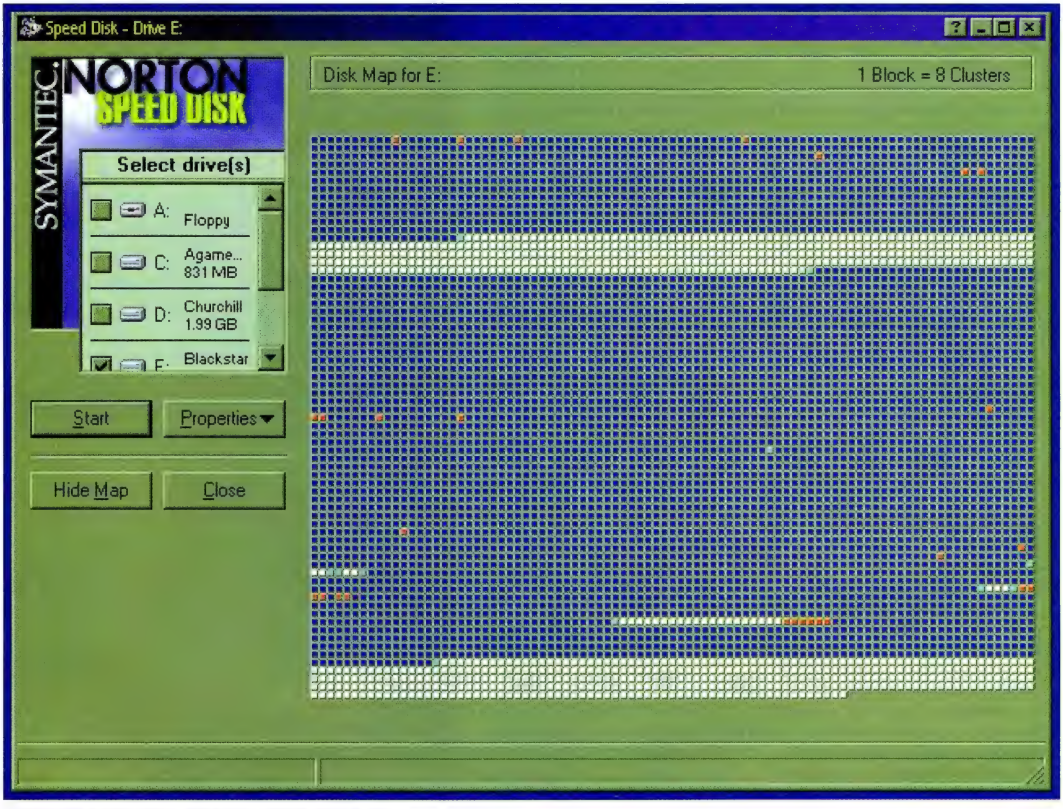
So, the answer: drive A: is the plug furthest away from the end you have attached to your motherboard. Plug that in correctly and make sure your BIOS knows drive A: exists and your drive will work.

Can I 3Dfx?

Q I have an Acer Aspire Pentium 200MMX. I am soon going to buy a 3Dfx card but all the things I have read about them says as a part of installing the card I have to connect it to my current video card. My problem is that my current video card (ATI Rage) is built into my motherboard. I have searched in the motherboard manual and on the motherboard itself and I can't find any connection to my video card except the port where my monitor connects. You have got to tell my how to connect a 3Dfx card (Orchid Righteous 3D) to my video card.

Aaron Cosgrove

3Dfx Voodoo 3D accelerators work with your existing video card. When you buy a 3Dfx you get a neat little cable that pokes out of the back of your PC, running between the 3Dfx and your main video card, linking them. Your monitor then plugs into the 3Dfx. Not elegant, but simple.



NORTON'S SPEEDISK. EVERY MACHINE NEEDS IT.

A Your video card connects to your 3DFX, not the other way round, and it does so through a 'pass-through' cable that loops outside your PC from your video card output to the 3DFX video input. You'll have no problems hooking up a 3Dfx!

SCANDISK SCANDALS

Q I recently got a dialog box saying: ***"Scandisk found 12,288 bytes of data on drive C that might be one or more lost files or directories, but which is probably just taking up space. To look at data choose save. Scandisk saves it in the root directory with a file name such as 0000.chk then use the type command to view the contents of the file(definitely choose save if earlier repairs made any files or directories unaccessible."***

Being a coward I chose save.

I also got another dialog box (as if the first was not enough) saying:

"Scandisk is about to make changes to drive C. If you want Scandisk can create an undo disc that you can use if you need to undo Scandisk changes. To create an undo disc insert..... If you don't want to create an undo disc choose skip undo."

Could you please explain before I turn into an alchohlic, or even worse a politician. Can you explain in simple language. Thank you, and have a very nice day.

J.Macklin

A In simple language: when files are written and deleted all over your drive over the course of many weeks or months lost clusters or files can occur. This is basically a spin-off of the inefficient FAT file system where the FAT sometimes ends up pointing two or more files to the same cluster or deleted files aren't correctly updated in the FAT.

Normally it's just a FAT error, that is the FAT can be repaired by scandisk or other disk doctoring software to correctly reflect the contents on your disk. However sometimes the errors are real and any reports of linked files must be resolved - often leading to loss of one of both of the files involved. This is why you are prompted for an 'undo' disk so that if you lose vitally important information you back out to the previous state where you might have more chance of recovering it. This is also why *.CHK files are created in your root directly regardless - any linked or lost file data is recovered and stored in these files. Viewing them with a hex editor will often reveal where they may have come from, and if there is any information you wish to keep you can simply cut and paste it.

Generally though such files can be deleted to save space, and as always it's wise to check your disks with scandisk or Norton's at least once a week. If you leave it too long these problem will build and compact until you WILL lose information.

This, of course, is one reason why you optimise drives as well. It not only speeds up disk access but also keeps files sequential, minimising the chance of file fragments sharing a sector on the drive.

RAID

Q I have recently upgraded some of the components in my system (for the second time in 6 months) and I was told that the current hard drives I have, in particular the Bigfoot, were quite slow and that a SCSI drive would make a noticeable difference.

This got me to thinking about RAID and my questions specifically are:

1) Just how much faster would say a SCSI

Quantum Fireball HD be than my IDE Quantum Bigfoot HD?

2) If I were to RAID say 2 or even 3 SCSI HDs together, how much faster would this be than a single SCSI HD?

3) How much faster would this be in real terms, would it be for instance very noticeable in games such as Quake 2?

4) Does the size of the HD make a difference to speed?

5) Would it be possible to keep one of my IDE HDs, separately, while having RAID or just a single SCSI HD?

6) Is there any drawbacks in having RAID?

7) My new mainboard supports SCSI, would I need any other components other than the hard drives?

8) Finally, could you give me an idea on the cost and value for money? Would I be better off with just a single SCSI HD and a 3Dfx card?

Mark Waters

A RAID is one of those things that keeps on giving me a woody. Speed speed SPEED! So I'll gladly answer your q's:

1) That depends, are we talking narrow/wide/ultra SCSI drives? IDE/EIDE/DMA33? Generally IDE can come close to SCSI at each applicable level, but then SCSI costs more so you sort of expect that. Generally a SCSI will outperform its IDE counterpart purely because of the SCSI interface and design, not to mention because of features such as command queuing which IDE isn't capable of doing.

2) 2 or 3 times faster :-). Well, almost. If you're going to RAID 0 or use any level where striping is involved, you can generally achieve a throughput equal to a little less than the number of drives involved, depending on the file size. If, for example, you made a RAID 0 array out of 3 SCSI drives with a stripe size of 64k and loaded Quake you can be sure Quake'll be loading three times faster (bus bandwidth permitting). If you go to load your 40k Word doc you won't notice a difference.

3) see 2)

4) Yes indeed. It's not necessarily a vast and noticeable difference, but larger drives are packing in more information per square inch as it were and as such when the disk is read more information can be transferred over the same area.

5) Of course. IDE drives are controlled by your (often built-in) IDE controller. SCSI drives are controlled by a SCSI controller. Both can live together in harmony.

6) Not at all! Well, ok, there are risks. Say you have 2 SCSI drives making up a RAID 0 array. Should one drive die, you've lost all your information despite the other drive being fine. This is logical - data is 'striped' over both drives. If one drive dies, the other drive only has half the information for any file larger than your stripe size, not to mention the directory structure and FAT. Of course the same applies to a singular drive though. If your single drive dies, you've lost the information there. Theoretically then the risk is only greater to the degree of the chance of one of two drives failing as opposed to the chance of a single drive failing. Now ask yourself, how many drives have failed on you?

Also if you want to ensure data integrity, RAID is the way to go. RAID 1 for example isn't any faster than a single drive, in fact writing is slower - because the second drive is an exact mirror of the first. If one drive dies, you retrain all your information. I could go on more here but I don't have the space. There are, however, 7 RAID levels (more if you consider they can be mixed) and each level either focuses on speed, data integrity or both. A RAID Level 6 array can, it is said, have up to 3 drives fail and no data will be lost!

7) Nope, apart from SCSI drivers for Windows etc. Also, make sure you find out what type of SCSI connector you have - 8-bit (Narrow, 50 pin) or 16-bit (Wide, 68 pin). Also find out if it's Ultra capable. Then you go shopping for drives to match.

8) SCSI is always more expensive. It's not just faster, but more efficient. With IDE, the CPU controls the drive and this takes time. With SCSI the CPU just tells the controller what it wants to do and the SCSI controller takes care of it. SCSI has a very low CPU overhead - it means your system (games included) is much more responsive.

If you can afford it, RAID. Of course it'll be faster, but it'll cost a whole lot more too. It might be easier to just go for a single SCSI drive, in which case go for an Ultra Wide - they can be expensive but even one of these drives, on its own, can outperform a 2-drive IDE RAID 0 array as configured by that wonderful BIOS, MR.BIOS!

Tech Tips

Personalise your PC with quick & easy tweaking tips

START MADE SIMPLE

Surprisingly most gamers aren't aware that you can easily re-organise your start bar for speed and easy access. Got a favourite game or app? Click Start —> Settings —> Taskbar and choose Advanced. Find a program in your menu tree that you use regularly and drag it to Programs at the top of the tree. Now when you click Start the program will be visible at the top of the menu, saving you from drilling down into the menu tree.

SPEEDY KEYS

Don't know about you, but slow key repeats annoy me. In fact, slow anything annoys me. You've got a Mega-Ninja Spice Girl PC but find your key strokes a little slow? Click Start —> Settings —> Control Panel and then click Keyboard. Drag the two bars to the far right giving you the shortest repeat delay and the fastest repeat rate. The same effect can be accomplished in DOS by typing:

MODE CON RATE=32 DELAY=1

If you add this to your AUTOEXEC.BAT, it'll run everytime. If you've never used fast key repeats before, you're missing out on one of the finer pleasures of your humble PC. No, that's not a strange thing to say. Leave me alone.

Kaj "Quakeman" Haffenden has sent in another handy hint for your reading pleasure. A big thanks, and a repeat mention of his name (that's Kaj "Quakeman" Haffenden, to be sure), for taking the time to think of his fellow gamers!

ALTERNATIVE STARTUP

If, for some reason, you want something to load each time you start Windows but *don't* want it to appear in the Startup folder; add a key in the "HKEY_CURRENT_USER->Software->Microsoft->Windows->CurrentVersion->Run" folder in the Registry and set the value to the filename of the program you want to automatically start.

HYPER»

AUSTRALIA'S NO.1 VIDEO GAMES MAG

FORSAKEN
ALL-FORMATS 3D ACTION MAYHEM

GRAN TURISMO
PLAYSTATION'S ULTIMATE RACER

STARCRAFT
THE LONG AWAITED PC STRATEGY EPIC

TEKKEN 3
HUGE PREVIEW ON THE FIGHTING GAME OF THE YEAR

CARDINAL SYN
SONY'S NEW MEDIEVAL 3D FIGHTER REVIEWED

AND MUCH MORE!

COMPLETE RESIDENT EVIL 2 WALKTHROUGH

SONY analogue dual shock controller and new improved N64 GAMEPADS reviewed
This month's feature: FORSAKEN. meet the teams behind forsaken.
Find out how the PC version shapes up!

12 PAGES OF CHEATS & PLAYGUIDES

ON SALE MAY 13TH

ORACLE

The Oracle plays everything. Ask him for help

There's been a slight delay with getting back to some of your responses. It was ...well, um, sort of my fault. You see I invited everyone over to the Temple for a huge Easter bash, you know, Zeus, Buddha, Jehovah, all the big guns were there, plus most of the hip young deities who are just making the scene. It was a great party. Still is in fact. But to be completely frank, we haven't had a bash this good since the middle ages, and you earth folk appear to be getting along fine so far with your adventuring. Seems this month Curse of Monkey Island is causing the most anxiety. Shame on you Lucas Arts, making me work overtime. Anyway, I'll keep it short, as I wish to return to a most interesting conversation with a certain young pagan fertility goddess.

Oracle
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St.
Redfern
NSW 2016
setup@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

BROKEN SWORD

I'm playing Broken Sword and have come to a standstill. I'm in the cabin. I've found a key in Slades clothes, but it's not the right one. Also, I picked up the mickey vial, the bible, two things from the pocketbook (and put it back on the table). When the phone starts ringing, I try to hide in the closet, but it's not good, he finds me and sends me to my maker. What do I do? Please help!

James Murray
Narrabeen, NSW

Rumour has it you enjoy spending time in closets. Luckily for you this time you have a legitimate reason. Hiding in the closet is the right thing to do, but you need to be sure that nothing is visibly disturbed or you will be killed. Try leaving the bible alone - make sure all drawers are reclosed, wallet back, closet doors closed, sliding door closed, etc. You will need another key - look for an alternate hiding place after you survive your stay in the closet and when Slade is not looking. Oh, and stop wearing those high heels.

BROKEN SWORD 2

Please help me, I am stuck in Broken Sword 2. I am at the Glease Gallery. I am sure that i have to find out which docks Glease gets his pots from, but not sure how. Can you help?

Steve Miller
Upper Lansdowne, NSW

Talk to Glease and then show the pot to the man drinking wine (he's an art critic). With all good art critics use the flask of absinthe on his glass two times and he will fall and smash a display case. Go to the back of the room and open the boxes. Take the label you just found and look at it. Then talk to Glease again. This should help you.

CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND

We are currently playing The Curse Of Monkey Island, and cannot get the ship. We have the map and crew, but the ship eludes us. Please share your wisdom with us.

H AND L NEBEL
LATHLAIN, WA

The first thing you need to do is fix the hole in the boat with the glue and the bung from the rubber tree. Use the boat to head out to the Galleon and get yourself captured. Upon walking the plank use the bread knife on the plank and return to the deck. Open the door to get yourself tarred and feathered. Head back inland and enter the chicken restaurant. Speak in spanish to get back on board the Sea Cucumber. Use the ventriloquists book on the Captain and grab the map when he leaves. Use the map to find where X marks the spot. Dig up Elaine and sail away into the horizon.

Aaaaargh, I really need your help. I got Exams coming up and cannot concentrate until I get this problem off my chest with the dreaded Curse of Monkey Island. I know that in order to get the third hairdresser in my crew I need to get the golden tooth of Captain Blonbart. But how do I get the jawbreaker?. I know from the easy course that I need the jaw-breaker. I'm frustrated in searching for anything that the hairdresser could accept. But he doesn't take the chewing gum or anything else!!!!? Pleasssse ease my suffering.

JOHN DANIEL
SPRINGHILL QLD

The answer is simple once you know how. In Mega-Monkey mode, to get the jawbreaker proceed to the barber shop and slap Cut-throat Bill on the back twice. The second time, he spits out the jawbreaker onto the floor next to the chair. Take it and hike over to the other side of the village. Go into BlondeBeard's Chicken Restaurant and give him the jawbreaker sweet. His gold tooth comes loose. He then asks for something chewy, so give him some fresh bubblegum. Once he blows a bubble, pop it with the pin from the floor of the Voodoo Preistess' shack in the swamp. Pick up the tooth which lands on the floorboards- but don't be too hasty- if you try to leave with it, he'll notice and take it. Chew some bubblegum, leaving a used wadge of gum. Put the tooth in this. Inhale some helium through the remaining balloon and then chew the wadge of gum complete with tooth. The bubble floats through the overhead window. Take the piepan if you haven't already and leave. The gum balloon has popped and the tooth is in the murky puddle beneath the drain. Use the piepan to sift through it and then you have the tooth. Show it to Bill in the Barbers and you have another crew member.

Could you please tell me how to find the money to pay Kind Andre for the game of cards to win the diamond in Curse Of Monkey Island?

ANDREW GRIXTI
FAIRFIELD WEST, NSW

Yet another popular question. Who needs money when you can lie. In the smuggler's cave tell them you have a lot of money, and talk to King Andre. Agree to play poker with them for the diamond. While in the game give King Andre the five "death" tarot cards. You'll win the game and get the diamond. Just don't get caught cheating...

DIABLO

I need help with Diablo. I already have a level 8 sorcerer and I am not yet able to defeat the butcher. What is my mistake?

ALEX YOUNES
MARRICKVILLE, NSW

The butcher's famous catchphrase "fresh meat" still sends shivers down my spine. However, he is not the hardest of foes to defeat. The best method of attacking with a sorcerer, is not to let him get close to you where he can hack you up. Step back a few paces, fire him some spells, step away, fire, step away, fire until he dies.
Another surefire method is to find a door with a grating next to it before entering the butchers chamber. The butcher cannot open doors so if you let him chase you, go through the door and shut it quickly to trap him on the otherside. You can then cast a few firewall spells at him through the gate until he croaks. Just make sure he doesn't make it to the door before you shut it.

SPACE QUEST 6

Oh spiritual one, can you guide me with your wisdom through Space Quest 6. I've just started the game and I am already stuck. I've just killed an android and earned 50 buckazoids. I know I can buy a fine bottle of booze at the liquor store but I don't know else what to do. I can't rent a room (haven't enough buckazoids) or talk to the babe standing on the block. Also as great as i am with video games i still cannot beat the Alien guy at Stooge Fighter. Can you help?

RALPHIE
CAIRNS QLD

It's been awhile, but I remember you have to give the bottle of booze to Elmo, the fat drunk guy walking around. He will give you a cheat code for Stooge Fighter 3, which will allow you to win against the alien guy. The alien guy will then give you enough buckazoids to rent the room. If only your life was so easy...

OVERSEER

I'm really, really stuck in Tex Murphy's Overseer. I got through the gallery and have been to the game room and the control room and have done everything. Now do i have to go back through the gallery to get to the elevator? If so how am I suppose to get to the panel box to deactivate it, Please help!

DONNA SPELLINGS
PENRITH, NSW

In the computer room there's a panel by the door that turns off the security system. That takes care of the gallery floor and you can walk right across it without burning your feet!

CODE

THE EASY WAY'S THE RIGHT WAY. CHEATING IS THE RIGHT WAY

AGE OF EMPIRES

To activate these codes, go to chat mode (Enter), and then type any of these codes in all caps:

DIEDIEDIE you all die
RESIGN you resign
REVEAL MAP reveals all the map
PEPPERONI PIZZA gives yourself 1000 food
COINAGE gives yourself 1000 gold
WOODSTOCK gives yourself 1000 wood
QUARRY gives yourself 1000 stone
NO FOG remove the fog-of-war
HARI KARI suicide (a more spectacular way to resign)
PHOTON MAN get a 'Nuke Trooper' (guy /W A laser gun)
GAIA control the animals (You loose control of your humans)
FLYING DUTCHMAN juggernaughts turn into the Flying Dutchman
STEROIDS instant build
HOME RUN win the scenario
KILLX where 'X' is the players position (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8)
BIGDADDY get a cool car /W a rocket launcher
BIG BERTHA heavy catapults have greater range and damage
ICBM ballistias get 100 range points
HOYOHOYO priest speed up a lot,and get 600 hit points
JACK BE NIMBLE catapults fire peasants who do somersaults as they fly through the air
E=MC2 TROOPER get a futuristic trooper who fires nuclear missles which explode when they hit
MEDUSA villagers become medusa. When villager is killed, he becomes a black rider and if killed again becomes a heavy catapult

FROGGER 3D

Pause Frogger in single player mode and type each of the cheats including spaces (but without quotes). A message will flash on the bottom of the screen after you have typed in the code acknowledging which cheat you turned on.

NO MORE ROAD SPLATS Infinite Lives
SHOW ME MORE ZONES PLEASE All Zones Open
WAY TOO HARD FOR THE LIKES OF ME All Levels Open
To quit a level when the cheat is activated press ESC.

G-POLICE

Type these at the main menu:

WOOWOO Havoc Sirens
SUPACAM Enemy FallCam
BENIHILL Benny Hill cars
PANTALON All Secret missions (in Training menu)
DOOBIES Infinite Shields
MRTICKY Infinite Weapons [you cannot progress past current mission]
STATTOE In-game info [you cannot progress past current mission]

GRAND THEFT AUTO

The codes must be typed in as your name, but after you have typed them and pressed enter you will be able to put in your name. Codes are case sensitive.

6031769 grants unlimited lives.
buckfast * on the keypad grants all weapons.
hate machine raises all point values.
iamthelaw eliminates police.
itcouldbeyou grants 999999999 points.
itsgallus grants access to all levels and cities.
itstantrum grants unlimited lives.
nineinarow grants access to all levels and cities.
porkcharsui toggles diagnostic mode.
stevesmates eliminates police.
suckmyrocket grants all weapons, full armour and a get out of jail free card
super well grants access to all levels and cities.

JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES 2

To activate the Cheat function, Enter Talk Mode and then type in the desired cheat code.

5858LVR reveals the entire map
BACTAME restores full health
DEEZNUTS increases your force level
ERIAMJH toggles fly mode
IMAYODA makes you a master Jedi
JEDIWANNABE 0 turns off invulnerability
JEDIWANNABE 1 turns on invulnerability
PINOTNOIR restart the current level retaining weapons
RACOONKING maxes out your jedi abilities
RED5 grants all weapons
SITHLORD makes you a master Dark Jedi
SLOWMO 0 turns off slow motion
SLOWMO 1 turns on slow motion
THEREISNOTRY skip to the next level
WAMPRAT grants all items
WARP # level warp
WHITEFLAG 0 disables computer AI
WHITEFLAG 1 enables computer AI
YODAJAMMIES increases mana

TOTAL ANNIHILATION

To use these codes you have to press enter to bring up the message box, press + and type in the code, then press enter again to activate the cheat.

ATM Increase metal and energy by 1000
NOENERGY Decrease energy to 0
NOMETAL Decrease metal to 0
RADAR 100% radar coverage
DOUBLESHOT Weapons do double damage
HALFSHOT Weapons do half damage
DITHER Dither instead of line of sight
NOWISEE Full map and disables line of sight
CLOCK Show elapsed time
CONTROL # Change sides in a skirmish (player number 0-3)
SING Units sing when given orders
CDSTART Start CD music
CONTROL# Control a different skirmish AI
CONTOUR# Displays 3D contour, # = 1-15
ILOSE You lose
IWIN You win
NOSHAKE Stop explosion screen shakes
SWITCHALT Switch between squads with alt+#
VIEW# See how much metal and energy a player has

TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP (TOCA)

CMCHUN toggles go kart view.
CMCOPTER toggles aerial view.
CMDISCO toggles disco fog.
CMFOLLOW toggles film camera view.
CMGARAGE adds extra vehicles to the two empty garages after the Laguna.
CMLOGRAV toggles low gravity mode.
CMMICRO toggles top down view
CMNOHITS toggles no clipping mode.
CMSTARS toggles evening sky.
CMTOON toggles cartoon horizon.
FLEXMOBILE toggles rear wheel drive.
TANK car horn becomes lethal weapon.
XBOOSTME speeds gameplay in intermittent bursts.

Back Issues

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#2 Kali net games, Earthsiege 2, Zork Nemesis, C&C playguide.

#3 3D graphic accelerators, Settlers 2, Cyberstorm, Zork Nemesis walkthrough.

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#22 Battlezone, 1GHz hot chips, Ultima Online Chronology & Tour guide, Starcraft Beta, Unreal, Quake 2 playguide

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#24 Tiberian Sun preview, Voodoo II cards benchtested, Blade Runner playguide, Rebellion, Incoming

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LETTERS

WIN A 32 BIT PCI SOUND CARD!

The Innovision Letter of the Month wins the new LEAF 32 bit/3D sound card, using the Maestro ESS Wavetable chipset. PCI 32 bit sound leaves old ISA Sound Blaster technology for dead, freeing your CPU for faster gameplay. Valued at $199, ph Innovision on **03 58318833** for more info, or visit ***www.innovision.com.au.***

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The PCPP CD

Call me paranoid, overly cautious or maybe just naive, but when PC Powerplay start messing about with Java/Netscape code to allow it to access the hard disk I get a little worried.

For those of you who came in late, PCPowerplay Issue 23 has a new look menu system which looks much nicer but takes about 5 times longer to load to do the same thing the old menu system did. Add to this the fact that when I tried to load the old menu system it crashed my system and did the same to two other friend's systems.

I understand that you have been getting bad feedback about the old menu being 'dated' and 'inflexible' but it did what it was supposed to. Even if the menu didn't load a game straight away, you list where to find it on the CD so I can do it myself. I don't expect my PC to be as straight forward to use as a console i.e. put CD in unit and press the 'start' key when loaded, but that is why I love my machine.

So to come back to my original point, please find another way to 'modernise' your menu system without allowing 'idiots on the net' to get access to my hard drive and without taking so long to load.

Simon Korzec

Yes, there were bugs that caused problems with the PowerPlay 23 CD, some of which remained on issue 24. #23 was the introduction of the new menu system. We tested it and it worked. However, on some PCs which had Microsoft IE4 installed, some ugly error messages appeared, and in certain cases, the new menu didn't work at all. We included the old PowerPlay menu and for everyone that had a problem, that was the temporary solution. For anyone affected by either of these CDs, we humbly apologise.

Now it works. The CD with this issue has had all the bugs ironed out and will work with just about any browser. The old menu is still there, just in case, and will remain for a while yet, as many of our readers actually preferred it.

Besides fixing the bugs, we've also been able to improve the performance greatly, so no more 2-3 minute loading times for those with a slow CD ROM.

Sorry again if you had problems, we're trying to make PowerPlay the best mag we can, and the new CD Menu is part of that process.

Sprites vs. Polygons 1

I'm an American who reads your magazine every month to get game info. I live in Thailand, so your magazine is just about the only good source of info on games I can get. Anyway, I wanted to tell you about the Starcraft V.S. Total Annihilation. I really like Starcraft, and after almost 2 years of waiting, I feel like one of these crazed marines you find in Quake 2.

I would do almost anything for it, and just love everything about the game. Units, storyline, enemies, graphics, and so on. Probably the worst thing about Starcraft is that they are still using sprite technology. On one of the forums in Battle.net, I came upon an interesting point: In Diablo, the monsters were all sprites, right? Those monsters look lots better than and 3D modeled monster. Think about it: doesn't the way Blizzard use sprite technology in a game give it personality? TA has beautifully crafted units, that are all 3D and move 360 degrees, but when I played the game, I was subject to immediate motion sickness. The way they moved reminded me of a toddler's tonka truck, big and clunky.

This SC VS TA war could go on forever, at least as long as Starcraft is yet to be released. One of my best friends is a die-hard TA fan. If I say something about TA, then he says something about the crappy graphics in SC. It just gets to be maddening, at how long SC has been in development. It would be very sad, however, to see SC fail utterly and get trampled by the TA juggernaut. I wish that the whole TA VS SC war could just be done with. It's pretty immature, and just a way of getting negative attention. Starcraft probably won't surpass TA, and that's kind of sad for all the Blizzard fans. Then again, it's that way in a lot of things in life. Starcraft should be applauded at how good it will be, and the time and effort put into it. TA is a highly evolved game, and should be commended on graphics and on being a higher level game.

There are lots of people who think differently then me, but I just wanted to put in an opinion.

Kyle Bueschlen

INNOVISION LETTER OF THE MONTH

Patch Work

Many letters in the past have pointed out the current state of the games industry, that of everyone copying each other, with many a publisher jumping on the hot genre bandwagon. Well, apart from this has anyone noticed the actual state of games when they first come out? The quality in general is dropping substantially. I was compelled to write this letter because of your last couple of issues, where many games are released unfinished, making them crap, or good games released and then require a couple million patches to get it working correctly. A prime example of the latter would be, dare I say it, Total Annihilation, and nobody has bothered to point out the amount of patches which were initially released. And even though the box proudly proclaims the extra units would be released on the cavedog website, you could not do this until the 1.2 beta 1 patch had been released.

Also, as pointed out in your Quake II review, it's also buggy as the proverbial Uni. student flat. In your latest issue you reviewed Descent to Undermountain, and gave it the bagging it well and truly deserved. It's so bad for those with internet connections, but those without have to wait until the patches are released on a cover CD or hope that a friend has a connection, I know because I have been in that position. But a game being released in this condition is truly intolerable. An another thing that is really shitting me is Sega, you'd think that a company like this could release at least one decent game with 3D acceleration that's fun to play, but no, hell would freeze over first. Then there's East Front, which your review stated that it needed about four patches before it was really playable. And lastly, there's Battlecruiser 3000 (thanks for the brill. game Derek) and we all heard about that one. I think publishers need to start backing off and let the developers do their thing, I mean, it's great that we can buy a game and get upgrades, but talk about abusing the privilege.

Wesley Clarke

In the old days, only some games were patched - and that usually wouldn't happen until the game had been out for 6 months. Getting the patch itself involved either fighting your way through the phones to a Tech. Support dept., which in most cases meant overseas calls, or navigating the wilderness that is the BBS network. Now we've got the internet and it's as easy for gamers to get the patches as it is for developers to post them. The question though, is whether developers are becoming lazy for this very reason, rationalising the release of buggy software with the comfort-zone belief that they can simply chuck as many patches online as are needed, as often as needed.

Sprites vs. Polygons 2

I have been playing computer games since I got my first computer the Amiga 500 around 1987, ah those were the days; 16 bit highly detailed 2D sprites abound... those days are gone.

Now in the 90's I have been attacked by the killer polygons, these chunky 3D blocks with applied texture mapping, bundled together to represent things. Ok, so polygons do move quite fluently and realistically but in my opinion they are far from the most beautiful things to hit the computer screen. I can safely say that games like Mechwarrior do look quite impressive, for one reason the

Feeble human about to be mulched by fearsome Protoss. What's your favourite Starcraft Race?

mechs are robots, robots are more often than not supposed to be blocky, so the graphics suit the game. Take a look at the Jedi Knight games some of the character representations do look rather demented in polygons, for example. See Threepio in "Jedi Knight: mysteries of the Sith".

Another thing, why oh why do classics like Frogger and Xevious have to be rehashed 3D? These games were great and they served their time and even though the basic concepts of the games have been kept, in the new versions they don't have the same appeal they once had.

In conclusion I am not totally against all 3D games, 3D just isn't right for all games, and even if 2D and 2.5D graphics are perhaps considered dated, that doesn't mean they're bad, and all people don't like these graphics anymore.

N. Drew

Now here's an unexpected comment. Anyone else bothered by the sprite vs. polygon thing? Is this an issue?

Extended Phallicism

In response to Paul Stewart's Letter of the Month I have three comments to make.

1. Armed with a larger than pocket size dictionary (yes bigger is better) I did some research. As he has so cleverly discovered the root "phallus" becomes the adjective "phallic". But it is also the root of Phallicism which is the worshipping he refers to, and Phallicists who are those who worship. So Paul's phallus fear makes him a phallicistaphobe. Perhaps a linguist could clarify these roots, but I fear a fear of phallicists may require a particularly cunning one.

2. Phalluses are not to be feared by gamers. Computers are sexy, frisky creatures and what could feel better in the hand than a joystick. I'll not be parting with my techno-phallus for any man. As for the kiddies, they're probably all down at the arcades impressing each other with their stick work, I know I was.

3. If I was worried about my sexuality I would rather have a stick in my hand than my fingers around a mouse ball. Don't fear phalluses or sex, leave that to the Quakers.

Nathan Thompson

Yep.

Rendition Drivers

For the last few months, ever since I upgraded my poor tired old P75 to a marvellous (yet soon to be average) P200 MMX, I have been 'Umming and Ahhing' over which 3D video card to buy. Eagerly I read and reread all your Benchtest reports on the latest cards out and eventually I decided I couldn't wait any longer and had to purchase one.

FREAK of the month

The Letter Box

I just thought, while we're caught up within the orgasmic turmoil that is Quake 2, that I'd add something that sort of squeezes the most out of the mostest of games. Do we all remember when Aliens: The Director's Cut was screened on TV a couple of years back? And when it screened Good Ole Ridley Scott brought back the ever so stylish "Wide-Screen-Format"? You know the one with the kinky black bars across the tops and bottoms of our TV screens? Well, we common folk can too experience such style within our very own homes.

"How?", you ask? It's quite simple really. Just adjust the trusty Vertical Hold so that it squishes up the screen, and voila! you have Wide-Screen-Format in your every own PC's! Sure it might feel a little odd at first, but gee, you can just about smell "Aliens" comin' 'round that dark corner with the sparks strobing away at your Tension-o-Metre, with that kind of graphical enhancement!

Try it for yourself. It's cheap and takes about 1 second to install.

Even Tonya Todman would be proud of such a D.I.Y concept.

Cam

Thanks for that tip Cam. We gave it a go and yes indeed, the world moved for us. We ran the I-War intro - which is already letterboxed, but squished in to a screen height of just a couple of inches it came alive for us as never before. Squinting improves the effects too, as does using a home-made Ned Kelley mask. Brilliant stuff this! You're a true innovator of our times Cam, bless you and all who sail in you.

Being a student meant that my budget was minimal to say the least, so I required a card that offered high performance for an economical price. Thus my eyes were drawn to the Diamond Stealth II S220 and the high praise it received, so without further ado I bought one for a very good price ($228).

The thing is now I have it I'm not exactly sure whether it is very well supported, a lot of games say that they support the V2200 chip set, which in your review was said to be the same as my V2100 except for the MPEG and DVD support, but these games do not mention the V2100. Also I discovered that in order to play GLQuake or in fact any OpenGL game I have to add miniports (and stuff) downloaded from the net to my drivers. This is not really a problem, it is just that all these add on bits come with readme files that state that they could be full of bugs that may seriously harm my computer! They also mention that it would be better to wait for an official point release, yet I can't find any information on the net when or if these are coming any time soon. Now, this letter may sound a bit accusing, believe me it is not meant to be, I purchased this card because information I received from many places not just your magazine. It's just that I'm a tad worried and I was wondering whether you could tell me what I should and should not be adding to my card's drivers. Am I just over worrying about things I know nothing about?

Oh I almost forgot to mention the little matter of also having to buy a new monitor($400's worth) as I was informed (after they had installed my card and taken my money) that my one (14inch) couldn't handle the increase in refresh and resolutions rates. Nice that.

James McCluskey

The 2100/2200 Rendition series, unfortunately, is having some early driver problems, which we've reported on in the past. Hardware drivers fall into exactly the same category as the letter above about game patches, as far as we're concerned. It is undeniably poor treatment of consumers, but the flak Rendition have received means it won't happen again, at least from them.

Ultimate Ultima

I'm writing this letter to speak about a game, which I believe has revolutionized the entire gaming world since it's release. No, it's not a genre standard setting game like Quake or Warcraft, but rather it's a game which has completely changed my ideas on online gaming. 'It' is Ultima Online. It's addictiveness, sheer playability and enjoyment have surpassed the standards of every other game I have ever played. And, most astonishing to me, is the fact that it's online. Before playing it, I shared David "The Solo Man" Wildgoose's beliefs that only single player games could reach this standard of playability. In fact, his statement in February 1998's issue "Multiplayer games, particularly online ones, face what I see to be irreconcilable problems when it comes to being anything much more than head-to-head combat." since the release of Ultima Online I believe is completely and utterly obsolete. I urge David to play Ultima Online, and bask in it's brilliance for a while - he, I'm sure, like me, will have new hope for the future of Multiplayer Gaming.

Likewise, I urge all of you readers to go out and get Ultima Online, believe me, you'll be pleasantly surprised. While on the subject of Ultima Online, I would like to point out that even though I subscribe to a cheapish unlimited-access ISP in Perth, the lag is by no means an aspect that has been 'play stopping' or even 'play disrupting'. See you on the Pacific Server.

Andrew 'JuffaArchui' Nicol

Completely true. As anyone who'se been on Ultima Online will know, it's one hell of a gaming experience. Do it if you haven't already.

As Unreal As It Gets

I have a copy of Microsoft's Flight Sim 98. I am surprised that Microsoft can actually claim that it's "As real as it gets". Even the

Letter: Ultimate Ultima

Few game experiences have had the impact of Ultima Online, are you missing out?

planes in FS98 and FS5.1 don't even crash realistically. The nose goes into the ground, at the top of the window it says <crash> and you hear a crash sound. PATHETIC. I still use the sim for flying but not for graphics. Also on the note of Flight Sims, the standard price for FS98 is AUS$89.95 and FS95 is AUS$79.95. But, I saw a copy of FS5.1 in a shop with a slightly battered box for AUS$85.95. Isn't it a bit silly selling an older version for a higher price than a newer version?

Robert McAlavey

We Have Adventures To Forge

On the cover of the April (#23) PC PowerPlay magazine the words "Adventure Games, a dying genre?" When I saw this, being the avid adventure game player I am, I quickly turned to the contents page to see what page this was story was on. I must say how disappointed I was in reading this. David Wildgoose, who's reviews etc. (especially the multiplayer versus single player debate) I have always enjoyed reading, must have thought about this article for about three seconds. He begins to talk about how good the old adventure games were (which is true) and says how these sorts of titles are slowly becoming less popular. He talks about all the good points and the things that made playing them worthwhile, then he goes on to say that today there are no such games, with multi-story plots or realism. Seriously! Did any of the old LucasArts games have multi-story plots, were they true to life? No, but they were funny. We're not getting adventure games that are worse than before, we're beginning to expect too much. Besides, what's wrong with single plot, predetermined ending adventure games any way? You work until you complete a problem or puzzle and as a reward you see what happens next in the story. Adventure games were made so we had to think about what we do, but they are supposed to be fun too. All computer games are made for our entertainment and relaxation, not so we have to work. Why change a genre when it is great now?

Luke Gardiner

David Wildgoose replies:

Sorry, Luke, but I think you missed the point of my feature. Adventure games need to change because, although they were once popular, they're obviously not any more. I'm not sure why you keep mentioning "realism" either. Real-time does not mean realism. I want real-time adventures, not necessarily realistic ones. Play Blade Runner and The Last Express, Luke. Take a look at the future!

Microsoft rule

I am sick of people running down Windows 95 and Microsoft alike. Imagine the PC without Windows 95? Let's imagine for a second that these people get their way, and Windows 95 is erased on every computer in the world. For one, it's goodbye DirectX and Direct3D, returning games to their original confusing DOS installation programs, requiring extensive knowledge of IRQ's, DMA's and so forth which with most people that have been using Windows 95 all there life (unlike me) don't know about, meaning some games won't work because they don't know how to fix them or even get them running in the first place. The currently developing Direct3D "standard" at the moment would be abolished and individual drivers would have to be supplied with every game for specific devices eg. 3D accelerators and sound cards this means games that don't support your hardware, won't work, and games would take up to 30 megs of hard disk space more depending on the amount of devices supported because of extra drivers.Then it's hello Macintosh Monopoly. Do you really think Macintosh would not monopolise as Microsoft have? Monopoly is the ultimate peak to a successful business but is this a bad thing? If you just hate Microsoft because of their monopoly on the OS market, or because of their buggy IE4, then you can go ahead and delete DOS, Windows 3.x, Windows 95, Windows NT and the rest of Office 98 etc. and see how well you go on your computer. Now imagine a world without all of that stuff? First of all that cool beeping bootup would be completely different and god knows what technology might have unfolded? The instigators of this wide spread Microsoft Hate Syndrome are mostly the "Newbies" to computers. By "Newbies" I mean people that have only been using PC's since Windows 95 onwards and have never had to learn hundreds of DOS commands or screw around with volatile and ugly Autoexec.bat and Config.sys files to get a game working. The internet would probably only suffer slightly without Windows 95 due to alternate products for example Netscape Communicator for Mac but wouldn't there be Macintosh Internet Explorer 4.0 as well? Meaning another bloody browser war? The partial 32-bit architecture of Windows 95 also means increased game quality unavailable in DOS or Windows 3.x. For better or worse Microsoft is here to stay, be thankful for what could have been isn't and glad for what currently is.

Kirk Stalnaker

We agree completely Kirk. Well readers, your thoughts?

Wasted Westwood

Tiberium Sun, where is it? Of late Westwood have dragged the reliable name of the Command and Conquer series of games through the pig shit. By releasing such crap as the Sole Survivor add-on pack (isn't the point of C&C to control an army to strategically win?) it has really annoyed all the fans of the series by teasing them with a lovely juicy morsel of a game then replacing it with a festering heap that was probably cut from the inner colon of a cow (a.k.a Sole Survivor). I've gone into withdrawal symptoms from lack of something NEW AND EXCITING damn you Westwood. It's just crap crap crap crap crap. I'm bloody sick of it.

Freak Boy

It's gameplay, Baby!

I would just like to say that some people with brand new PCs and no past experience with computers and gaming will not even bother to look at or play a game unless it has stunning graphics and sound. I have seen it on three occasions myself and have heard the comments. Gameplay is the most important thing in gaming. Games with great graphics and sound are still important and much desired but they still rely on good gameplay for success. These new buyers have no or little respect at all for the past. I have been gaming for 10 years, when fun and addictive games were both possible and plausible to make, without using the graphics I see today. Games like Ultima 7 & 8, Doom 1 & 2, Star Control 2, Civilization 2, Stronghold, Dune 2 and Warlords 2 were all recently scoffed at by these people with their new and powerful PCs and most were not ever tried for longer than 15 minutes. Even today I still find these games worthy. If it is not as visually appealing as the newer titles (some of which I like and often play) and does not cause the whole room to reverberate with a pumping sound track, many years of hard programming and classic software titles can be misunderstood and forgotten. The ignorant often label them as failures.

Boon

Quake schmake

See I don't normally do this, I read your mag when ever I can but, WILL YOU PEOPLE SHUT UP ABOUT QUAKE !!!!

I'm sick of it! Me being an ex-fan of Duke Nukem 3D (not saying that it's any better or anything) turned RTS, I still play these games once in a while but what can I say? I played Quake for a couple of days and then just deleted it a never looked at it again. Now, more people to complain to!

I've just finished reading PC PowerPlay #23 and reading through the letter I discovered that this Vaughan Wilson person was downing the legendary Total Annihilation (I mean that's OK... see I'm downing Quake here and I know that I'll get a lot of people saying "this guy's a idiot" or something along those lines) but geez, you have to admit that it's the most legendary game and you think that it deserves what 80%... phhhhhhffffffttttttt!! Read the reply that Ashton gave you. But you are most certainly in the minority with your opinion of TA. So far it has scored 90+ in every major gaming mag in the world!

There I rest my case Vaughan!

Brendan Grayson

Big call Brendan, other PowerPlay readers will, I'm sure, be gentle with you as they beat you around the head and call you names. Still, an opinion is an individual thing...

FLASHBACK

Classic games revisited. Sniff...

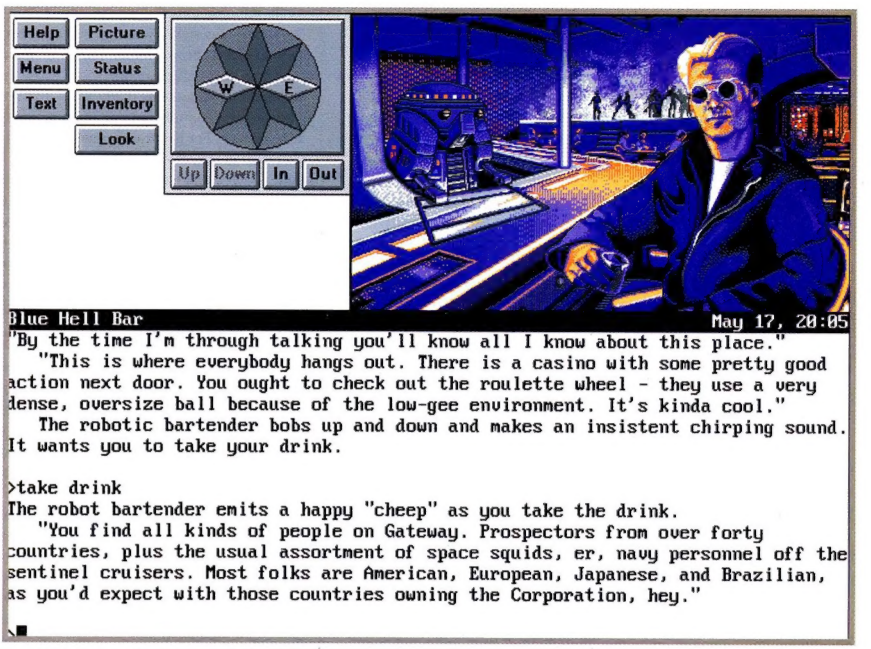
GATEWAY

Legend Entertainment
Year: 1992
Reqs: 386DX/33, VGA, 640K RAM

Based upon god-like science fiction author Frederik Pohl's novel of the same name, Gateway presents an astonishing potential for a great gaming scenario. Sometime in the 21st century, an asteroid housing a vast network of underground tunnels is discovered between Venus and Mercury. Clearly the work of some long-departed alien race, commonly referred to as the Heechee", the tunnels contain hundreds of spacecraft capable of faster-than-light travel. Immediately, on Earth the Global Corporation is formed, consisting of representatives of the world's governments, to conduct research into this startling new discovery.

Soon the asteroid, the eponymous Gateway, is inhabited by those people wishing to escape an over-populated Earth. They volunteer to "test" the FTL spacecraft by undertaking journeys into the unknown. No one knows how to properly pilot the spacecraft, how long a journey make take, or even where its final destination may lie. Many volunteers never return - they may suddenly emerge from FTL travel on the verge of a black hole or in the very centre of a star. But the financial reward from successfully returning, especially with a new discovery of further alien artifacts, more than equals the risk.

You play a new recruit - or "new fish" - on board Gateway, lucky recipient of a one-way ticket thanks to a lottery win. The game follows your adventures on and off this intergalactic parking lot. Will you find riches beyond your wildest dreams? Will you meet your death spectacularly, imploding in a red giant? Or will you die alone of starvation, hurtling through Tau space to a destination thousands of years away?



Interactive fiction, Gateway shows how good it was

Gateway (the game) brilliantly captures the sense of awe, of not knowing what the hell could happen next, evoked by Pohl's novel.

One of the other reasons I liked Gateway was that the interface was so damn flexible. You could play it as a straight text game. You could play it as a text game with pictures. You could even play it like a Lucasarts game, clicking on verbs and nouns to construct sentence commands. Using the mouse you were able to click on any object in the graphic display - one click to examine, double-click to perform the most obvious action (open the drawer, sit on the seat, etc). Essentially, Gateway let the player decide exactly how they wanted to play the game.

David Wildgoose

MAY AS WELL GRAB IT, IT'S FREE!

I ought to mention that an equally impressive sequel was made a year later, and you can find both games amid a reasonable selection of other Legend titles on a compilation called The Lost Adventures Of Legend. A freeware version of Gateway was made available at the time and can still be downloaded from the Games Domain site (*http://gamesdomain.topend.com.au/demos/demo/gateway.html*). If I've managed to pique your interest in an oft-forgotten genre, then I heartily suggest you check it out.

Screenshots of Shadow Warrior™ courtesy of 3D Realms® Entertainment.

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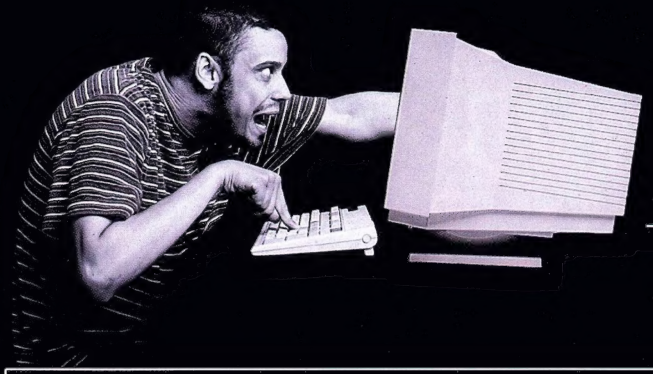

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